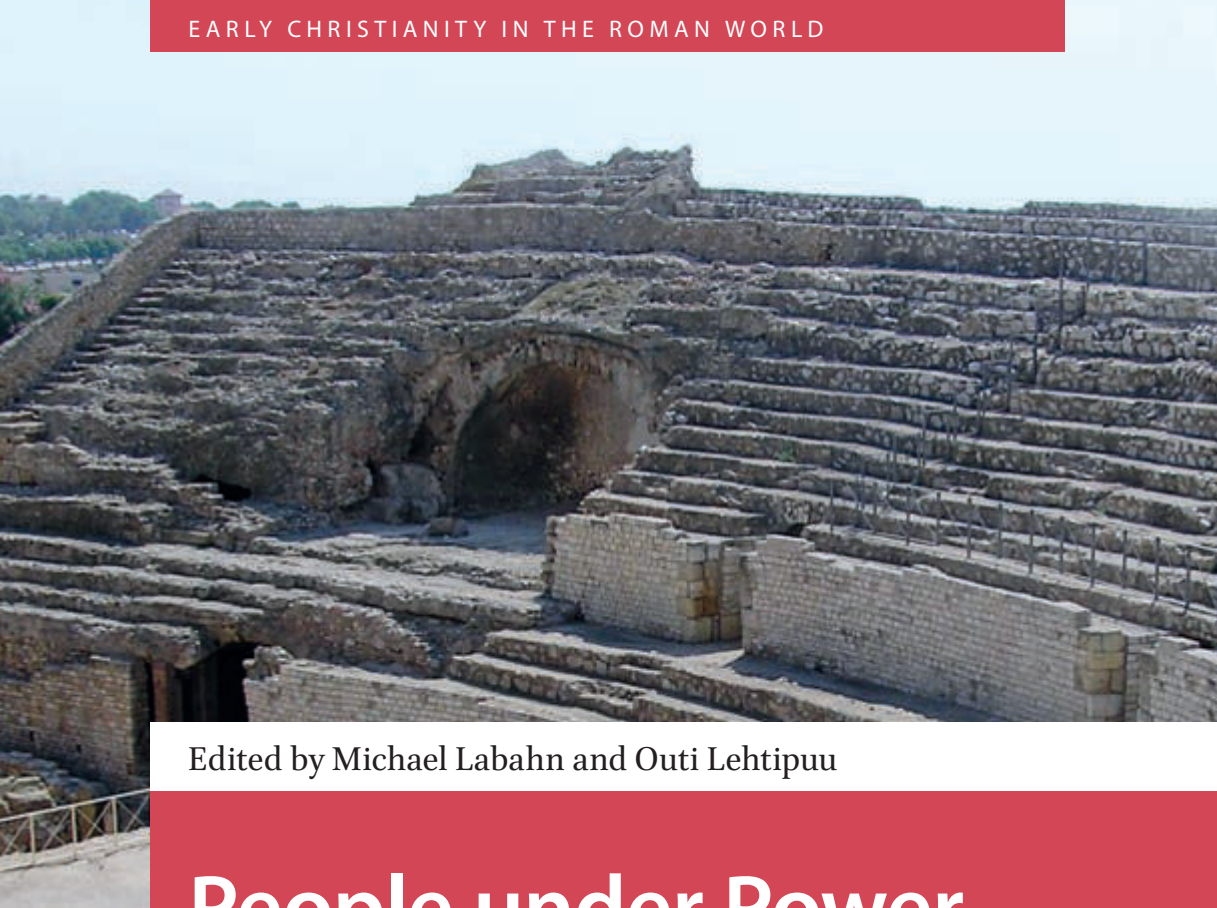


EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN THE ROMAN WORLD



Edited by Michael Labahn and Outi Lehtipuu

People under Power

Early Jewish and Christian
Responses to the Roman Empire

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People under Power

Early Christianity in the Roman World

Offering a new forum for studies on the formation and development of Christian beliefs and practices in the first centuries of Common Era, *Early Christianity in the Roman World* focuses on the diverse manifestations of the Christian movement in Roman and Hellenistic cultural contexts. Treating Early Christianity as a multivalent phenomenon, characterized by a fundamental diversity, *ECRW* also examines the interactions between the many groups in the ancient Mediterranean world that impacted developing Christianity, including the relationships among various Christian groups.

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*Edited by
Michael Labahn and Outi Lehtipuu*

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Cover illustration: The Amphitheater of Tamagona, Spain. Photo by Michael Labahn

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

Amsterdam University Press English-language titles are distributed in the US and Canada by the University of Chicago Press.

ISBN 978 90 8964 589 0

e-ISBN 978 90 4852 199 9

NUR 704

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Introduction

Christians, Jews, and Roman Power

Outi Lehtipuu & Michael Labahn

The Roman Empire forms the historical and cultural frame within which the emergence and rise of Christianity took place. From its beginnings in Galilee to its gradual expansion all over the Mediterranean, the early Christian movement was deeply embedded in the Roman world. The Roman Empire also played a vital role in the development of Judaism after Pompey appeared on the Palestinian “map” in 64/63 B.C.E. From that time, Rome became an economic and moreover a political factor that influenced political, religious, and cultural developments within Judaism. Finally, Roman military power forced Judaism to take new shape after the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by Titus, the future emperor, in 70 C.E. Instead of seeing the formation of Judaism as a prior process to the birth of Christianity, as was often the case in traditional scholarship, several recent studies emphasize that the two religious traditions evolved in conjunction and in dialogue with each other. It took several decades, sometimes centuries, before outsiders were able to see them as separate movements.

The Roman view on Christians and Jews was not always an outsider view. Another recent emphasis in early Christian studies relativizes the polarity between “Jewish” or “Christian” on the one side, and “Roman” on the other. These were not always mutually exclusive categories; according to Luke, a Roman centurion supported the building of the synagogue in Capernaum (Luke 7:5), and the apostle Paul held Roman citizenship (Acts 22:25-29) as did many later Christians and Jews. Moreover, both the developing Jewish and the nascent Christian movements shared the cultural vocabulary and concepts with their wider environment. Jewish and Christian discourses were part of the broader Hellenistic-Roman discursive world and can only be understood in relation to, not separate from, this context. The categories “Jewish”, “Christian”, and “Roman” were intertwined in several ways, and their meanings were defined and negotiated differently in various connections.

From the present-day perspective, however, there is a profound difference between these categories: whereas both Judaism and Christianity are vibrant religious traditions, the Roman Empire no longer exists but belongs to the distant past. Perhaps for this reason, it is not always easy to

remember that the relations between the ruling power and the religious communities were not characterized by reciprocity and symmetry. Even though Judaism was officially recognized and given a special status that allowed Jews to follow their traditional practices, early Jewish and Christian communities were marginal groups that often did not attract any special attention from those in power. Most other inhabitants of Roman society probably did not encounter members of such obscure cults and were even unaware of their existence. There were, nonetheless, signs of mistrust and prejudice against outsiders that led to political or social pressure. This naturally varied according to time and place.

The Roman presence was a reality in the lives of all inhabitants of the empire. In addition to administrative practices, such as taxation and census, and rituals associated with the cult of the emperor and other civic cults, Roman rule was understood as an oppressive power through the presence of its military. Roman rule was also seen and felt through its construction policy that produced baths, theatres, hippodromes, and other constructions and through other artefacts, such as statues raised to honor members of the imperial family and other prominent people or to Roman gods, coins, and inscriptions praising the emperor, calendars with months named after the ruling family, and even imperial milestones marking roads.

How did this dominant ideology of the Roman Empire affect the everyday life of Jewish and Christian religious minority communities? The Christian proclamation about a “Son of God” who was the only true “ruler” and “savior” of the world served as an obvious challenge to the sovereignty of the emperor, but what were its practical consequences? Which word best describes the relations of ancient Judaism and early Christianity with the Roman Empire: antagonism, adaptation, or indifference? At least since the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* at the end of the nineteenth century, attention has been paid to the influence of Roman power on Jewish thinking and the formation of developing Christian movement(s). Nevertheless, other cultural and social factors became more dominant, which meant that no political interpretation of early Christianity and its writings was given – and only a few studies that dealt with the impact of Roman power have emerged.

Moreover, a special interest in Roman power and its influence on Jesus and the early Christian movement has arisen in contemporary moments of political change and crisis. For example, the German student movement of the late 1970s and the political-religious orientation of the Reagan-Bush era in the United States encouraged investigations into the social and political aspects of the teaching of Jesus, the New Testament texts, and early Christian thinking. Since then, studies on the relations of Jewish and

early Christian writings concerning the imperial culture, ideology, and political as well as religious claims have been flourishing, mainly focussing on Jesus, Paul, the *Gospel of Mark*, and the *Book of Revelation*. However, other texts and movements are receiving increasing attention, and a wide range of hermeneutical methods are used, which makes “empire studies” one of the most innovative fields of research in early Christian and early Jewish studies.

There are no simple answers to complex historical questions, nor is it possible to make exhaustive analyses of the vast phenomena involved in the study of the impact of Roman power politics on Christians and Jews. The task of the present volume is to show that the topic is more complicated than often assumed and that relations between the empire and the Jews and Christians living within its limits cannot simply be described in terms of conflict, clash, and opposition. As several recent studies have made clear, early Christianity and early Judaism were diverse movements that included various versions of how to be and live as a Christian or Jew. The attitudes toward the Empire also varied and differed both geographically and temporally. There is no such thing as the Christian or the Jewish response to imperial rule and ideology. The attitudes of peasants living in the Roman Galilee, for example, were not the same as those of the urban dwellers living outside of the region who wrote about them. The further the Jesus movement expanded, the more diversified it became, while reactions toward the Roman authorities proliferated. Moreover, the Roman world was no less diverse; the faces of the empire did not look the same for all its inhabitants. This profound diversity is mirrored in manifold ways in the ancient sources and is also reflected in the essays of this volume.

This collection of essays offers insights into the relations of early Christians and Jews with the dominant Roman power. They address the question using different methodological approaches and studying a variety of sources, both literary and epigraphic. Most of these contributions are based on presentations given in the seminar *Early Christianity between Judaism and Hellenism* at several meetings of the European Association of Biblical Studies (in Tartu 2010, in Thessaloniki 2011, and in Amsterdam 2012). Together, they show how multiform and diffuse the phenomenon in question is.

Three of the essays focus on Jewish communities living under Roman power. George Brooke (University of Manchester) discusses the use of the designation Kittim in the sectarian Dead Sea Scrolls. The word is usually understood as referring to the Seleucids, the Romans, or other military powers. Reading closely the relevant Qumran texts, such as *Peshar Nahum*,

Pesher Habakkuk, the *War Scroll*, and other texts, Brooke shows the ambivalent features related to the word; the Kittim are viewed both negatively and positively. This he explains by borrowing the concept of hybridity from post-colonial discourse. In addition, Brooke emphasizes the usefulness of the designation which can serve as a name for changing referents in changing historical circumstances.

In her contribution on the expulsions of Jews and other groups from the Roman community, Birgit van den Lans (University of Groningen) expresses a contrasting view: what did the Romans think about the Jews and other expelled groups? Why did imperial Rome order Jews to be expelled from the city? What did it mean in practice? Earlier scholarship has taken the expulsions as signs of a general anti-Judaism, but a comparison with other expelled groups – such as Egyptians, astrologers, philosophers, and actors – suggests that they can be treated as part of Roman power politics, that is, promoting social order by means of rhetorical force. This means that the expulsions were not necessarily enforced but were manifestations of the boundaries of Romanness properly understood. Sources are suspiciously silent about any concrete actions taken against these groups. Moreover, the city limits were not specified and some of the expelled philosophers, for example, seem to have retreated to suburban areas. Even if not carried out in practice, the expulsion orders were an important means of constructing the proper Roman moral community.

The third article focusing on a Jewish community is a study on the Jews in the Roman province of Pannonia by Nóra Dávid (University of Vienna, Institute for Jewish Studies). She discusses what can be known of the earliest Jewish settlers in the region based on the epigraphic evidence. A major methodological question is how an inscription can be identified as Jewish. A newly discovered inscription from Carnuntum that can be dated to the time before the Bar Kochba revolt in 135 C.E. suggests that there were Jewish inhabitants in the region earlier than is often presumed. However, it was during the Severan period (193-235 C.E.) that the presence of Jews in Pannonia intensified. Pannonia enjoyed a special status in the eyes of the Emperor Septimius Severus. When he was acclaimed emperor, he was the governor of Pannonia Superior and his Pannonian legions helped him in the consolidation of his power in the civilian wars between 193 and 197 C.E. As emperor, he granted the region a wide range of privileges and developed the province significantly. This encouraged new settlers, people from Judaea among them.

The next three essays aim at contextualizing New Testament texts with the Roman Empire and its ideology. If Rome was an ever-present reality,

how is its presence reflected in the New Testament and the social practices of early Christians? Anders Klostergaard Petersen (University of Aarhus) analyzes Paul's perspective on imperial politics, particularly the imperial cult, and asks whether it is the imperial cult that provides a relevant frame of reference for the study of Paul's letters. Paying special attention to some apocalyptic passages in Paul's letters, Petersen argues that many of the questions and problems of the contemporary debate on the New Testament and the imperial cult are already visible in Adolf Deissmann's classic study of the subject (1911). While maintaining that "Paul and his peers would have had to be rather blind in order to overlook the omnipresence and ubiquity of the imperial cult" and, thus, acknowledging that the imperial cult and related practices offer an important contextual frame for Pauline texts, Petersen questions whether Paul's letters exhibit a deliberate engagement with the cult and whether early Christ-followers attempted to create an anti-imperial ideology.

The starting point for Martin Meiser (University of Saarland) is the *Gospel of Mark*. His particular viewpoint is the reception history of Mark's text. If Mark's gospel is critical toward the empire and its ideology, how was this criticism understood and continued in the texts of subsequent Christian writers? Meiser takes a closer look at three Markan texts: the beheading of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29), Jesus's teaching on serving others (Mark 10:35-45), and the question about paying taxes (Mark 12:13-17). Strikingly, the early interpreters of these texts seldom understand them in political terms. The scene of the beheading of John the Baptist mainly arouses critical comments on luxury, and Jesus's words on servitude are taken as an exhortation to personal humbleness. The criticism toward the empire also remains mild in the case of Jesus's teaching concerning imperial taxes, as most commentators emphasize obedience and the duty to give Caesar what rightly belongs to Caesar.

Klaus Scholtissek (University of Jena) studies the *Gospel of John* and particularly the foot washing scene in John 13. His analysis of the literary features of the text reveals the exemplary role of Jesus's action for Christian *diakonia*. He places this finding into an imperial critical frame: by placing himself in the role of a slave, Jesus introduces a counter-cultural practice to the dominant imperial social practice. Much in line with Klostergaard Petersen's argument, Scholtissek analyzes the Johannine thought world as mostly ignoring categories and practices of the Roman ruler cult, in contrast to studies that view the Fourth Gospel as a more critical reflection of Roman political power. According to Scholtissek, the anthropology, imagery, and ethics of the Fourth Gospel include universal elements and offer a variety

of connecting factors for different philosophical, cultural, and religious concepts. Although John seems to represent universal soteriology, it is worth asking whether even such an exclusive system as the Johannine narrative can work without being in critical dialogue with other systems of meaning, such as is represented by the emperor ideology.

The last three contributions focus on other early Christian texts and on how they reflect the interactions between imperial ideology and the early Christian movement. Mark Grundeken (Catholic University of Leuven) deals with the *Shepherd of Hermas*, a text often excluded from studies on the relation between early Christianity and the Roman Empire. The text, however, was probably written during the second century in or near Rome, which means that its author must have experienced the influence of the empire in all aspects of its sociocultural, economic, and political life. Grundeken suggests that, compared to several contemporary texts, the views on Roman authorities in the *Shepherd of Hermas* are quite moderate. The supreme power of this world may rest with God, but the earthly rulers may rightly expect their Christian subjects to obey their laws. Confrontation, let alone active resistance, should be avoided. At the same time, however, Hermas's criticism of idolatry and other features of the text seem to contain a hidden critique of the emperor veneration. These critical views can be seen as attempts to strengthen the identity of the Christian community.

It is not possible to study the relations of early Christians and the Roman authorities without commenting on martyrdom. The topic is taken up by Paul Middleton (University of Chester), who investigates how non-Christian Romans viewed Christian martyrdom. While it is now generally recognized that prior to the middle of the third century, official actions taken against Christians were local, sporadic, and short-lived, experiences of suffering and being persecuted form an important part of several early Christian writings. Suffering was not only unavoidable, it was also a sign of true discipleship. Christians understood martyrs' deaths as examples of heroic deeds which showed the courage, endurance, and bravery of the virtuous sufferers. They saw martyrdom in line with the Roman tradition of Noble Death, as exemplified by Socrates or those who died heroically in battle. Much to their puzzlement, non-Christians did not see the same nobility in Christian martyrdom. In pagan eyes, Christians were too eager to die, and their martyrdom was "too unreflective, too spectacular, and too messy", not a solution to shame but rather a cause for shame. Thus, instead of Noble Death, martyrdom was considered a repulsive Death Cult.

The collection closes with an essay by Marco Frenschkowski (University of Leipzig), who focuses on the legends of the emperor Nero, one of the

most fascinating Roman figures in the early Christian imagination. In non-Christian tradition, Nero had an ambivalent reputation but, in early Christian sources, he unambiguously became the epitome of evil. According to a popular belief, Nero would return to power after his death in 68 C.E., and sources depict several false Neros pretending to be the emperor leading rebellions. In Christian circles, Nero was often identified with the figure of the Antichrist, even though in some texts, *Nero redivivus* and the Antichrist are clearly two separate figures. Regardless of this, Nero still plays a role in the eschatological scenario. Revelations concerning Nero and other eschatological events was not open knowledge but rather part of arcane teaching often restricted to an inner circle of a few trusted individuals. According to Frenschkowski, this arcane character of the eschatological teaching might explain why so many early Christian writers so quickly forgot the role of Nero in the *Revelation of John*.

A compilation of these essays would not have been possible without the co-operation of all our contributors, to whom we would like to express our sincere thanks. We are also grateful to Amsterdam University Press, especially to Simon Forde and Erin Thomas Dailey, for their willingness to accept our collection for publication and for their help in all practical matters. Last but not least, we would like to thank Christian Seppänen, who helped with technical editing and compiled the indexes.

Part I

Jewish Communities in the Shadows of the Empire

The Kittim and Hints of Hybridity in the Dead Sea Scrolls

George J. Brooke, University of Manchester

1. Introduction: The Historical Parameters

Before discussing once again the Kittim in the Qumran sectarian scrolls, it is necessary to set out the historical and political parameters within which the comments of this essay are set. To my mind, the movement behind the sectarian compositions amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in the eleven caves at and near Qumran seems to have had a history that spanned well over two hundred years before the fall of the temple in 70 C.E., perhaps going back to the time shortly after the Maccabean Revolt, though some see traces of aspects of the movement even in the late third century B.C.E. The occupation of the Qumran site by a part of this movement probably took place at some time during the first quarter of the first century B.C.E.,¹ though a full analysis of the archaeological remains has yet to be published. This means that the origins of the movement rest in the closing phases of Seleucid influence in Judea during and after the Maccabean Revolt until the time of John Hyrcanus; its consolidation and diversification or fragmentation seem to belong to the reigns of Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus, the only two rulers of the period to be significantly independent from external political control, whether Seleucid or Roman; and the Qumran site's occupation is almost contemporary with direct or indirect Roman influence and control in Judea.

For some scholars it has seemed or become inappropriate to say very much about what might have been taking place in the second century B.C.E.² Such approaches propose that the 390-year scheme of the *Damascus Document*, though followed by a more precise twenty years when the movement was searching for the way forward, is nothing more than a symbolic number. In addition, the anonymity of the founding Teacher and his immediate opponents prevents any secure identification with actual figures. Given

¹ See especially Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

² See, e.g., Michael O. Wise, "Dating the Teacher of Righteousness and the Floruit of his Movement," *JBL* 122 (2003): 53-87; John J. Collins, "The Time of the Teacher: An Old Debate Renewed," in *Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the Septuagint Presented to Eugene Ulrich* (eds. Peter W. Flint, Emanuel Tov, and James C. VanderKam; VTSup 101; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 212-29.

that the majority of the scrolls were penned in the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E., and that the majority of actual historical names in the scrolls belong to the first century B.C.E., for those who take this approach it is in the first century that we should look for the principal period of activity of the sectarian organization represented in the scrolls. For some scholars, then, even the founding Teacher also becomes a figure of the first century B.C.E.

Though some of its emphases clearly need to be endorsed, I remain unconvinced of this revisionist scheme for the following reasons. To begin with, though the numbers in the *Damascus Document* are indeed symbolic and schematic and so cannot be used with any precision, nevertheless the force of the symbolic system should be understood as corresponding more or less with known periods of time, otherwise the schematic fulfilment suggested in the description of the scheme does not work.

Second, and more importantly, the date commonly assigned to the Cave 1 copy of the *Rule of the Community* is the first quarter of the first century B.C.E.; give or take a decade or two, this seems to me to be acceptable. But, alongside such a date it has to be remembered that two features of the *Rule* suggest that it has a longer history than can be fitted into the first century alone, namely on the one hand the existence of shorter and possibly earlier forms of the *Rule* and on the other the composite character of the *Rule* itself, which suggests that it comes at the end of a considerable period of development, let us say a generation or two.

Third, several scholars have noticed how a non-sectarian composition, *Apocryphon of Jeremiah C* (4Q390), presents an updating of the 490-year chronology of *Daniel* 9:24. Whereas *Daniel* 9 had divided such a period so that the events of 167-164 B.C.E. fell in the last week of a ten jubilee cycle, it has been argued, for example by Hanan Eshel, that the author of 4Q390 seems to have thought that the exile lasted for 70 years, priestly rule for 49 weeks (a further 343 years), the troubles surrounding the desecration of the temple a further week (7 years), after which there were ten weeks (70 years) of further defilement by the Hasmoneans. Thus, 4Q390 is a reworking of a Jeremiah tradition that is critical of the priests both on the eve of the revolt and for 70 years after the defeat of Antiochus: juxtaposition of the information in the *Damascus Document* with that in *Daniel* and 4Q390 surely discloses that the second century B.C.E. and shortly thereafter was a period when the suggestions of the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel were being rethought and reapplied. If indeed 4Q390 provides a key to seeing the start of Hasmonean rule as inaugurating a final 70-year period of priestly defilement within a 490-year cycle, then the symbolic calculations of the *Damascus Document* (CD) echo a very similar chronology, even if the

widespread witness of other sources indicates actual historical ignorance. In other words, for there to be forty years after the death of the Teacher, as CD 20 proposes, and if that can be understood as corresponding and overlapping with the final 40 years of the closing 70 years offered by 4Q390, then it seems that 4Q390 would corroborate a use of the symbolic numbers of the *Damascus Document*, enabling the conclusion that the movement's Teacher was indeed a figure of the middle of the second century B.C.E., and not of the first as some scholars have recently proposed once again.

What is the point of belaboring this maintenance of the second century B.C.E. as essential to the history of the movement represented in the sectarian scrolls? The point is this. All texts with any kind of historical dimension, even if that is only their own history, have at least two referential worlds: that of the author, editor, and compiler, and that of the contents. When we consider the sectarian literary products of the second half of the first century B.C.E., it is possible to read some aspects of them as simultaneously concerned with matters of the world of the authors (and even also the copyists) of that period as well as having reference to earlier times. To my mind, the significant contribution of those scholars who are attempting to focus on the history of the community in the first century B.C.E. is that they obviously prioritize the first century reading of many of the materials. For compositions such as the pesharim, this is surely correct; the pesharim are not to be plundered by those who would rather read them as exclusively relevant only for the understanding of a much earlier time. But such prioritization should not be done at the expense of taking into account the earlier life of texts or of the materials they use.

2. The Kittim

I turn now to consider the Kittim in the sectarian Qumran texts. I am principally concerned to set out at least two ambivalences in the evidence as a way of trying to suggest that something more is taking place in the sectarian compositions than a straightforward representation of the Seleucids or the Romans (or indeed any other imperial power) as the human enemy par excellence. The designation Kittim occurs in two or more forms of the *War Scroll* (1QM; 4Q285; 4Q491; 4Q492), and in four of the pesharim (1QpHab; 1QpPs; 4QIsa^a; 4QpNah), as well as in a couple of other very fragmentary manuscripts. It is a scriptural term that refers predominantly in various contexts to those associated with the Mediterranean coastlands.

Pesher Nahum and Pesher Habakkuk

I begin with the pesharim, four of which mention the Kittim. In the pesharim, the major references to the Kittim occur in *Pesher Nahum* (4QpNah) and *Pesher Habakkuk* (1QpHab). *Pesher Nahum*, in a manuscript probably from the end of the third quarter of the first century B.C.E., comes from times of direct Roman influence and interference. In a well-known delimitation of the period when Jerusalem had been independent, it uses the designation Kittim to refer to the Romans: "...the kings of Greece (מלכי יון) from Antiochus until the rising of the rulers (מושל) of the Kittim. And afterwards will be trampled [...]"³ The specific description of the leaders of the Kittim as "rulers" rather than as "kings" has commonly been considered to indicate that the passage refers to the pre-imperial Romans, and that the pesher must have been composed before 27 B.C.E.⁴ 1 Maccabees 8:12-15 shows that at the turn of the first century B.C.E., some Jews were clearly aware that the Romans were not ruled by kings.⁵

As far as the use of the term Kittim goes in simply designating the end of a period of time, its use could be considered neutral; in fact, the little reference to the Kittim in *Pesher Nahum* could be taken to imply an overall view of neutrality towards them – they are simply the means through whom God will destroy a wide range of Jews and others who have abused their power as rulers in Jerusalem. *Pesher Nahum* is indeed really concerned with the destruction of people, those in power, rather than with the devastation of Jerusalem and its temple, but the collateral damage that comes with the conquests of the Romans probably means that the view of the Romans in the pesher overall should at least be understood as ambivalent. On the one hand, it must be noted that the "theme of the Kittim as conquerors is found alone in *Pesher Habakkuk* and *Pesher Nahum* among Qumran non-biblical texts."⁶ Against the portrayal of the defeat of the Kittim in the other texts where they are mentioned, this might be seen as something of a positive

3 Shani L. Berrin, *The Pesher Nahum Scroll from Qumran: An Exegetical Study* (STDJ 53; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 87; on pp. 101-104, Berrin comments on how this is a clear reference to the Romans.

4 E.g., William H. Brownlee, "Kittim," *ISBE* 3 (1986): 45-46.

5 "They (the Romans) have subdued kings far and near, and as many as have heard of their fame have feared them. Those whom they wish to help and to make kings, they make kings, and those whom they wish they depose; and they have been greatly exalted. Yet for all this not one of them has put on a crown or worn purple as a mark of pride, but they have built for themselves a senate chamber, and every day three hundred twenty senators constantly deliberate concerning the people, to govern them well" (1 Macc. 8:12-15; NRSV).

6 Gregory L. Doudna, *4Q Pesher Nahum: A Critical Edition* (JSPSup 35; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 275.

accolade; the conquests of the Romans can be read as a matter of divine agency. But on the other hand, in the fragmentary phrase that follows the mention of the Kittim, they are clearly associated with the subsequent trampling of Jerusalem, probably that associated with Pompey in 63 B.C.E.,⁷ which hardly seems to be something of which the author of the pesher might approve, even though some scholars make restorations in the text to suggest that this came about with divine permission.⁸ In an earlier section of *Pesher Nahum*, the interpretation of Nah. 1:4a is sometimes restored with a reference to the Kittim as those who will be the object of divine rebuke and destruction, though this is far from certain as not even the initial letter of the title is clearly legible.⁹

Pesher Habakkuk survives in a manuscript penned at the turn of the era or even later; the Pesher itself was probably composed a little earlier, since there is some evidence that the Cave 1 manuscript contains an edited copy of the text. In *Pesher Habakkuk*, there are nine references to the Kittim. There is little dispute any more that the referent in all cases is to the Romans. Three features have usually contributed strongly to such an identification for *Pesher Habakkuk*. First, it is stated in the text that the Kittim sacrifice to their standards (1QpHab 6:4); though perhaps not an exclusively Roman practice, such veneration was clearly experienced by the Jews in 70 C.E. (cf. Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.316). Second, there seems to be a reference to the Roman senate as regularly understood by modern commentators (1QpHab 4:10-13):¹⁰ "Interpreted [this concerns] the commanders of the Kittim who,

7 As concluded, e.g., by Timothy H. Lim, "Kittim," in *EDSS* 1:470. The historical referents are worked out in detail and justified by Shani Berrin, "*Pesher Nahum, Psalms of Solomon and Pompey*," in *Reworking the Bible: Apocryphal and Related Texts at Qumran: Proceedings of a Joint Symposium by the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature and the Hebrew University Institute for Advanced Studies Research Group on Qumran, 15-17 January, 2002* (eds. Esther G. Chazon, Devorah Dimant, and Ruth A. Clements; STDJ 58; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 65-84.

8 Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (5th ed. revised; London: Penguin Books, 2004), 505, restores "[But God did not permit the city to be delivered] into the hands of the kings of Greece, from the time of Antiochus until the coming of the rulers of the Kittim."

9 In George J. Brooke, "The Kittim in the Qumran Pesharim," in *Images of Empire* (ed. Loveday C. A. Alexander; JSOTSup 122; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 138-39, I argued that Kittim was a possibility, given the parallels in phrasing in the surrounding context with 1QM 14. On similar grounds, Maurya P. Horgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretation of Biblical Books* (CBQMS 8; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1979), 168, restored Kittim here. More recent studies have been much more reticent to do so: Gregory Doudna, *4Q Pesher Nahum: A Critical Edition*, 273-74; Shani Berrin, *The Pesher Nahum Scroll from Qumran*.

10 So, e.g., Kathleen M. T. Atkinson, "The Historical Setting of the Habakkuk Commentary," *JSS* 4 (1959): 243; William H. Brownlee, *The Midrash Pesher of Habakkuk* (SBLMS 24; Missoula:

on the counsel of [the] House of Guilt, pass one in front of the other."¹¹ Third, both in *Pesher Habakkuk* and *Pesher Nahum*, the leaders of the Kittim are designated as "rulers" or "commanders" (מושלםי) (1QpHab 4:5, 10, 12), showing awareness that there were no kings in Rome (i.e., before 27 B.C.E.).

For the rest, the description of the military aggression of the Kittim is largely described in the terms of Habakkuk itself or of other scriptural texts; it is stereotyped according to tradition rather than written up from reports of front-line witnesses of any contemporary events.¹² The Kittim are quick and valiant in war with widespread dominion (1QpHab 2:10-16), they plunder the cities of the earth as they march (1QpHab 2:16-3:2), they inspire fear and deal with others with cunning and guile (1QpHab 3:2-6), their cavalry and beasts of burden trample the earth and they are rapacious and angry (1QpHab 3:6-14), they despise and ridicule kings and princes (1QpHab 3:17-4:2), they capture and despoil fortresses (1QpHab 4:3-9), they collect booty and tribute (1QpHab 5:12-6:8), and they kill without discrimination (1QpHab 6:8-12). In the last case there is a verbatim use of *Isaiah* (13:18) alongside allusions to other scriptural sources. In all this, we learn little or nothing that is specific to the Romans and the history of their campaigns in the eastern Mediterranean in the second and first centuries B.C.E.

The debate concerning the Kittim in *Pesher Habakkuk* has centered around the issue of whether they are portrayed positively, in some way acting as divine agents for the destruction of the wicked, or whether the description is negative, with the Kittim themselves amongst the condemned. In my opinion, the ambivalence noted for *Pesher Nahum* continues with *Pesher Habakkuk*. Those considering the portrayal as positive or neutral usually suppose that the references to the Kittim as Romans in *Pesher Nahum* and *Pesher Habakkuk* are earlier than the references to the Kittim in *Pesher Isaiah* (4QpIsa^a) and the various forms of the *War Rule* in which they are indeed the enemy to be destroyed. Those preferring to read all the references to the Kittim negatively suppose a consistent view amongst the

Scholars Press, 1979), 81; Hermann Lichtenberger, "Das Rombild in den Texten von Qumran," in *Qumranstudien: Vorträge und Beiträge der Teilnehmer des Qumranseminars auf dem internationalen Treffen der Society of Biblical Literature, Münster, 25.-26. Juli 1993* (ed. Heinz-Josef Fabry and Armin Lange; Schriften des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 221-31, esp. 225. Karl Elliger, *Studien zum Habakuk-Kommentar vom Toten Meer* (BHT 15; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1953), 179-81, considered that the reference was to the Hasmonean dynasty, since בית could be taken in that sense.

11 Trans. Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (5th ed. revised; London: Penguin Books, 2004), 511.

12 As I have argued in detail in Brooke, "The Kittim in the Qumran Pesharim," 135-59.

sectarians that was antagonistic to most other Jews and all Gentiles, for whom the Kittim stand as a cipher.¹³

For the evidence of the pesharim, I have tried to argue that it is possible to see some ambivalence in the attitude of the authors of *Pesher Nahum* and *Pesher Habakkuk* towards the Kittim (understood clearly as Romans). They are acknowledged as successful conquerors who have removed or destroyed at least some of the enemies of the sectarian movement. The realism of these pesharim is that indeed the colonial oppressor is necessary for dealing with problematic circumstances at home. However, such deliverance, if that it be, comes at a price, a very heavy price which the texts acknowledge and of which they do not necessarily approve. The price is the trampling of holy places and sacred sites, especially the temple in Jerusalem, the severe violence done to the land and its people, not least women, children, and the elderly, and the exaction of excessive tribute. Nearly all the terminology that is used to describe such excesses is derived either from the texts of the Minor Prophets themselves or from other closely related scriptures, so the cost of the intervention is presented stereotypically and not closely in relation to any particular set of military or political circumstances. The ambivalence here is the tension between some acquiescence in the need for foreign intervention on the one hand, and on the other the shock at the high price such intervention demands.

The War Scroll and Related Compositions

The *War Scroll* (1QM) and some other compositions¹⁴ seem to me to have an ambivalence of a rather different sort than that apparent in *Pesher Nahum* and *Pesher Habakkuk*. However, before we come to describe that, let us take a quick look at the mentions of the Kittim in these texts.

The *War Scroll* itself has a long and complex literary history, and this seems to be partly responsible for some aspects of the ambivalence I wish

13 A recent proponent of this consistently negative view is Richard A. Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes: Resistance and Apocalyptic Origins* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 123-41.

14 I am taking together here a range of texts, the elements of which have been divided into two groups in the analysis of Philip S. Alexander, "The Evil Empire: The Qumran Eschatological War Cycle and the Origins of Jewish Opposition to Rome," in *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov* (eds. Shalom M. Paul, Robert A. Kraft, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Weston W. Fields with Eva Ben-David; VTSup 94; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 17-31. Alexander distinguishes between the parts of these texts that contain "Rules" (tactics and strategy) and those parts that outline "Scenarios" (how prophecy is to be understood), both of which take particular shape in the period after the arrival of Pompey in Jerusalem in 63 B.C.E., the period Alexander sees as the real starting point of Jewish resistance to Rome.

to describe briefly in due course. Literary theories are most commonly associated with the work of J. P. M. van der Ploeg, Philip Davies, and Jean Duhaime.¹⁵ Van der Ploeg supposed that columns 1 and 15-19 were the earliest, but Davies argued in several publications that the opposite was probably the case. In particular, there seem to be three distinct sections: the first dealing with battles between the twelve tribes of Israel and the nations (1QM 2-9), the second containing various liturgical pieces (1QM 10-14), and the third describing in detail a seven-stage battle between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness and containing a dualistic reworking of earlier, less dualistic material (1QM 15-19). Davies reckons that “if a coherent sequence is to be reconstructed from this document, the battle [of 15-19] must correspond to that of the first seven years outlined in column i.”¹⁶ Since all the references to the Kittim bar one are in columns 1 and 15-19, if they are the last part of the composite work to be put together, then they might well reflect the Roman period to which the manuscript should be dated.¹⁷ The mention of a “king of the Kittim” (1QM 15:2) could then be read as a reference to a Roman emperor. For Davies, the final composition of the complete *War Scroll* (1QM) should “probably be assigned, then, to the late first century BCE or early first century CE, a date supported by the Herodian script.”¹⁸ It is important to note as well that the only other manuscripts of the *War Scroll* in some form that mention the Kittim (4Q491 and 4Q492¹⁹) are both dated to exactly the same period as the *War Scroll*, whereas other forms of the text are fifty or more years older.²⁰ The more recent comprehensive study of 1QM by Brian Schultz is engaged particularly with the final form of the text, though he is nevertheless concerned to identify at least two stages in how all the *War Scroll* materials came to be the way they are: an earlier

15 J. P. M. van der Ploeg, *Le Rouleau de la Guerre traduit et annoté* (STDJ 2; Leiden: Brill, 1959); Philip R. Davies, *1QM, The War Scroll from Qumran: Its Structure and History* (Biblica et orientalia 32; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1977); Jean Duhaime, *The War Texts: 1QM and Related Manuscripts* (Companion to the Qumran Scrolls 6; London: T&T Clark International, 2004).

16 Philip R. Davies, “War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness,” *EDSS* 2: 966.

17 Alexander, “The Evil Empire,” 30, views all the references to the Kittim in the War texts as references to the Romans: “they all seem to reflect the equation of Rome with the Kittim.”

18 Davies, “War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness,” *EDSS* 2: 967.

19 Rony Yishay, “Column 19 of the *War Scroll* (1QM),” *Meghillot* 8–9 (2010): 175–92 [Heb.], has argued that 1QM 19 and 4Q492 1 represent copies of an independent military composition. Even if what has traditionally been assigned to 1QM as column 19 were to be the remains of a copy of a separate composition, the date of the fragment and its reference to the Kittim in the late first century B.C.E. means that the argument of this essay is not undermined.

20 See the helpful chart in Brian Schultz, *Conquering the World: The War Scroll (1QM) Reconsidered* (STDJ 76; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 32; Schultz argues, however, that it is not unlikely that the earlier forms of the *War Scroll* also contained references to the Kittim.

stage concerned with last things and a later stage concerned to show how those last things might be mirrored in the present.

Although the dating to the Roman period and the anti-Roman polemic of the *War Scroll* have become the dominant way of reading the Rule, there has also been a substantial minority with other opinions. First amongst these in recent years has been Hanan Eshel, who has argued that whereas *Pesher Nahum* and *Pesher Habakkuk* clearly use the label Kittim to refer to the Romans, in the *War Scroll* the reference is rather to the Seleucids.²¹ His grounds for thinking this are as follows. First, there are a range of opinions about the identification of the Kittim in second and first-century Jewish sources.²² Second, the so-called *Pesher on the Apocalypse of Weeks* (4Q247) seems to set the Kittim in the seventh week in the Hellenistic period. Third, the Kittim in the *War Scroll* are only related to Asshur, as is plain in 1QM 11:11-12 on *Isaiah* 31:8 (the one reference to the Kittim outside columns 1 and 15-19) and in 1QM 18:2;²³ the common referent for Asshur in Second Temple literature is Syria. Fourth, the reference to a “king of the Kittim” (1QM 15:2) can be readily understood as a reference to a Seleucid king. And fifth, given the widely agreed dependence of the *War Scroll* column 1 on *Daniel* 11, it is possible that the author of that column was working at a time not long after the completion of the *Book of Daniel*, when the effect of *Daniel* 11:40-12:3 was seen to be in need of updating.

Eshel has now been followed by his student Brian Schultz. Schultz has argued that the *War Scroll* “was originally composed to describe warfare as it was expected to be carried out during the messianic age, but that eventually it was modified so as to include a description of the battle that would bring about the expected messianic age.”²⁴ He has argued at length that

21 Hanan Eshel, “The Kittim in the *War Scroll* and in the Pesharim,” in *Historical Perspectives: From the Hasmoneans to Bar Kokhba in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium of the Orion Center, 27–31 January 1999* (eds. David Goodblatt, Avital Pinnick, and Daniel R. Schwartz; STDJ 37; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 29–44.

22 Kittim = Macedonians (1 Macc. 11:8; 5); = Romans (Dan. 11:29–30); = inhabitants of the Greek Islands (*Jubilees* 37:10; cf. *Jubilees* 24:28–29); = parallel to Cappadocians (*Testament of Simeon* 6:3).

23 Eshel relies on the judgment of David Flusser, “Apocalyptic Elements in the War Scroll,” in *Judaism of the Second Temple Period. Volume 1: Qumran and Apocalypticism* (trans. Azzan Yadin; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2007), 140–58 (Heb. orig. 1980); Flusser saw that the *War Scroll* (1QM 1:3–4) never talked of the Kittim of Egypt, but only in the light of *Daniel* 11 that “they shall go up from there [against the troops] of the Kittim in Egypt.” Eshel, “The Kittim in the War Scroll and in the Pesharim,” 35, restores the same lines as: “After the battle they shall go up from there. [And the king] of the Kittim will [come] in Egypt.”

24 Schultz, *Conquering the World*, 7.

the interweaving of material from *Isaiah* and *Daniel* in 1QM facilitates the equation of Kittim with Assyria and thence with Syria: “there is little doubt that the Kittim in M were meant to refer to the Seleucids.”²⁵ Yet Schultz remains aware that in *Daniel* 11, upon which 1QM relies, the Kittim are the Romans, that more broadly in scriptural sources the Kittim and the (As) Syrians are regularly in conflict with one another, and also that outside the *War Scroll* the Kittim always come from the western coastal nations. But Schultz’s most pertinent observation is that “all our extant copies of M were copied at the same time as these pesharim, in the second half of the first century BCE, creating an interesting dynamic where the same term is given two different meanings in texts being copied contemporaneously.”²⁶ This apparent contradiction has been addressed in previous scholarship. Schultz shows how the term Kittim had a variety of meanings, in both eschatological and non-eschatological contexts, and he argues forcefully that in 1QM the term must refer to the Seleucids, even though in later and other compositions the term was clearly used to refer to the Romans.

Schultz’s study has convinced me that whoever composed 1QM, possibly in the late second century B.C.E., almost certainly had the Seleucids in mind when using the epithet Kittim. However, I am inclined to think that as the text of 1QM was variously edited and reused, there was nothing in the second half of the first century B.C.E. to prevent the later reader or hearer of 1QM 1 from understanding that the text referred to the Romans. In fact, one of the purposes of using epithets or sobriquets is so that identity can be transferred, not least when circumstances change. As Schultz has said: “By a stroke of historical good fortune (for the sectarians), Rome’s annexation of the Seleucid kingdom prior to that of Egypt allowed them to continue entertaining scenarios in which the final war could still be played out in a way consistent with M.”²⁷ But unfortunately Schultz has not seen that a later audience could have applied the consistency to the *War Scroll* itself.

To my mind, this ambivalence between second-century B.C.E. authorial intention and late first-century B.C.E. audience reception needs to be combined with an understanding that in some way the *War Scroll* is a military manual, amongst other things, as Jean Duhaime has encouraged us to believe. Study of the military tactics and paraphernalia in the scroll has suggested to several scholars that it is Roman matters that are principally in view, although other manuals from the time might also have influenced the

25 Ibid., 132.

26 Ibid., 135.

27 Ibid., 158.

content. Let us read the *War Scroll* with the post-colonial lenses of hybridity in mind. Perhaps originally written as an attack on the Seleucids, at the time of its composition they no longer formed quite the threat that had originally been implied by *Daniel* in particular. Nevertheless, rather than rejecting the Seleucids and all that they stood for, the author opted to describe his military manual in terms that mirrored the most technically advanced military machines of the time. The post-colonial on the one hand decries the colonial subjugation, but on the other is quick to adopt and adapt colonial traits. A couple of generations later a new colonial power has arrived; though some members of the sectarian movement seem to have acquiesced with Roman power, as *Pesher Nahum* and *Pesher Habakkuk* might imply, it soon became apparent that what had once been thought about the Seleucids as the eschatological archenemy should be transferred to the Romans.

Other Texts

There are several references to the Kittim in *Pesher Isaiah* (4QpIsa^a frags. 7-10). *Isaiah* 10:33-34 is cited and given interpretation in short sections, each of which is preceded by a requotation of the Isaianic text. The Kittim are identified with the mighty one of *Isaiah* 10:34 who will fall, according to the commentator, by the hand of Israel. The same happens to the lofty (Isa. 10:33b), who will be cut off, and to the thickets of the forest (Isa. 10:34a), which will be felled with an axe. Virtually all the descriptive terminology in these brief interpretative comments comes from the passage of *Isaiah* itself, though it is clear that the Kittim will indeed be destroyed. Some scholars have argued that this pesher, extant only in a late first century B.C.E. copy, is describing political and military circumstances involving the Seleucids at the *start* of the first century B.C.E.²⁸ If that is the case, then a similar change of referent as I am proposing for the *War Scroll* might apply here too, so that by the time this *Pesher Isaiah* is copied at the end of the first century B.C.E., there is little doubt that the label Kittim refers to the Romans. The late first century B.C.E. *Pesher Psalms* from Cave 1 (1QpPs frag. 9) contains a reference to the Kittim in the interpretation of Psalm 68:31. The interpretation is very fragmentary, and what survives reveals little more than that the Kittim are in Jerusalem and are the object of divine rebuke. There is no difficulty in reading that as a condemnation of Roman rule.

28 E.g., J. D. Amusin, "The Reflection of Historical Events of the First Century B.C. in Qumran Commentaries (4Q161; 4Q169; 4Q166)," *HUCA* 48 (1977): 123-52; followed by several other scholars.

In the so-called *Pesher on the Apocalypse of Weeks* (4Q247 6), the phrase מלך כתיים [כתיים] occurs in the description of the events of the seventh week, the time from the fall of the first temple until the author's present (as in 1 *Enoch* 93:1-10; 91:11-17). The reference to a king could imply either a Seleucid king or a Roman one of the imperial age (after 27 B.C.E.); since the phrase also occurs in 1QM 15:2; what applies to the shift of referent for the *War Scroll* could well apply here too. Thus, whilst it might be possible to read this composition as supporting the Seleucid identification of Kittim, by the time we are in the late first century B.C.E., with a manuscript in an "early Herodian bookhand",²⁹ then those who heard such a text would be most likely to think of the Romans as those who are the heirs of the condemnation that belongs to the eschatological enemy of the seventh week.

Lastly, the text now known as *Historical Text D* (4Q332) but previously understood as a *Mishmarot* composition, is extant in but three small fragments penned in an early Herodian formal script from about 25 B.C.E., give or take a generation. Fragment 2 famously mentions Salome Alexandra (line 4) and Hyrcanus rebelling (line 6), presumably against Aristobulus. Fragment 3 has the partial remains of just three lines, the second of which is restored by J. A. Fitzmyer, its principal editor, as ש[] הרוג יארים, and translated by him as "the leader of the Kittim killed S[]".³⁰ Fitzmyer describes some earlier proposals but does not venture an explanation of his own. It seems as if he is sympathetic to the restoration of the Kittim here, since in these kinds of annalistic compositions the Romans feature in the person of Aemilius Scaurus, but he studiously avoids restoring מלך, referring only to a "leader". Is this a positive, neutral, or negative description of the activities of the Kittim? It is impossible to decide, but it does seem reasonable to consider that by the time of this manuscript the Kittim are indeed clearly identified, as in *Pesher Nahum* and *Pesher Habakkuk*, as the Romans.

3. Drawing the Threads Together

The view emerges from this brief review of the data that in the sectarian compositions from Qumran there is some ambivalent information concerning the Kittim. In some compositions they seem to be viewed positively,

29 Ada Yardeni, "Palaeography and Date," in *Qumran Cave 4.XXVI: Cryptic Texts and Miscellanea, Part 1* (eds. Stephen J. Pfann et al. DJD XXXVI; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 188.

30 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "332. 4QHistorical Text D," in *Qumran Cave 4.XXVI: Cryptic Texts and Miscellanea, Part 1* (eds. Stephen J. Pfann et al. DJD XXXVI; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 285.

in others negatively. In some, the referent of the cipher is to one colonial military power, in others to another. How can such a diversity of views be maintained by a relatively small group? As already reflected in the more detailed discussion of this paper, there seem to be three issues to be addressed.

To begin with, it seems to me that it is important to consider the issue of how the various compositions were put together and to note the broad historical parameters within which such composition history belongs. Three brief comments can be added here. First, the *War Scroll* in particular has a long and complex history, both in terms of its sources and in terms of the various editions or recensions that arise alongside what has now survived from Cave 1. There are earlier and later forms of the text as well as earlier and later ways of reading it.

Second, chief amongst the sources, and so a significant part of the process of composition for all those texts where the Kittim are mentioned, is an appeal, both implicit and explicit, to earlier authoritative scriptural texts. How this works for the portrayal of the Kittim in the pesharim I set out in a study of images of empire long ago,³¹ but this has significant ramifications for all the references to the Kittim and their literary contexts. The use of the term gives priority to tradition and stereotype over precise contemporary historical concerns.

Third, in the light of *Genesis* 10, *Numbers* 24, and especially *Daniel* 11, there is nothing to inhibit some of the references to the Kittim in the sectarian compositions from having a Seleucid reference, even though the Seleucids only indirectly belong amongst those linked with the Mediterranean coastlands; subsequent identification of the Kittim with the Romans is clear enough.

The second major issue concerns the use of epithets. Modern readers should not underestimate the sophisticated use of language found in many of the sectarian compositions. To me it seems likely that the descriptive label Kittim was maintained in the sectarian literature because it allowed the characteristics of one eschatological imperial enemy to be transferred straightforwardly to another. When one considers the mild polemic of the *Halakhic Letter* (4QMMT) or the stronger identity-forming language of the *Hodayot*, it seems that the day-to-day opponents or enemies of the sect were overwhelmingly other Jews. Nevertheless, the broader international framework left its mark in sectarian understanding, though this was often dealt with through scriptural stereotype. Such stereotypes lie behind the

31 Brooke, "The Kittim in the Qumran Pesharim," 135-59.

use of labels like Kittim, but they also allow their users to transfer their perspective of the Gentile overlord easily from one generation to another. Within a historical framework from the mid-second century B.C.E. to the mid-first century C.E. it is entirely conceivable that the label could change referent even within the same document, as it is read and understood slightly differently in different generations.

The third large issue is the matter of ambivalence. Together with the transferability of the label Kittim, there needs to be some acknowledgment of the elements of ambivalence towards whomever it was used. Three points here too. First, there are different kinds of ambivalence. On the one hand, in the *War Scroll* in which the Kittim are the human face of the archenemy, it is still possible to see how the compilers of the text admire and use the Kittim's military prowess through adopting and adapting their military technology. In a period when the Seleucids were on the wane, this kind of use of their military insights is akin to a post-colonial stance that is happy to retain, sometimes almost unconsciously, the views and approaches of those who once were their overlords. In that sense, the *War Scroll* is akin to what in post-colonial studies might be described as a hybrid composition. On the other hand, *Pesher Nahum* and *Pesher Habakkuk* have a different kind of ambivalence in which a portrayal of the Kittim as the militarily cruel, devastating and fearfully efficient "other" is understood as the necessary divine agent, but nothing is said which does not allow such agency to become the archenemy once again.

Second, it seems to me unrealistic to depict the members of the movement associated with the scrolls as having to have an entirely consistent political attitude. Whilst it could be agreed who was the opponent amongst some of their close fellow Jews, attitudes towards those in international control might be more ambiguous and hybrid, not unlike the ambivalences in the compositions that use the label Kittim.

But, third, once that stereotyped colonial and imperial power comes physically near, then attitudes might indeed harden as choices in everyday life had to be made. For few, some, or many members of the sectarian movement, ambivalence was no longer an option here; true allegiance had to be named in terms of the proclamation of divine sovereignty, as that could be realized in the worship of the movement. At the final moment of resistance it was this proclamation, known most explicitly in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, that seems to have been the principal solace of a defeated group.

Thus, overall, the portrayal of the Kittim in a variety of sectarian compositions from the Qumran caves goes through several permutations as its referent changes and as attitudes to its referents also change in more ways

than has been usually supposed. When these nuanced considerations of the Kittim are taken into account, then similar varied sets of nuance can readily be observed for attitudes to empire in other literary corpora.

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The Politics of Exclusion

Expulsions of Jews and Others from Rome

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1. Introduction

The focus of this essay is on the expulsions of Jews from Rome from the point of view of Roman power politics.¹ Early imperial Rome saw several expulsions of Jews from the city. In 19 C.E., the senate passed a decree against the practice of foreign rites, dispatched some 4,000 Jews into military service, and ordered the rest to depart from the city. Some three decades later, Claudius issued an expulsion order for disorderly Jews at the instigation of one Chrestus. There has been much debate over the underlying reasons for, and the consequences of, these expulsions. While earlier studies viewed them as part of a general anti-Jewish policy, they are now more commonly understood as arising out of a momentary concern about the increasing influence of Jews in the city during the early Principate, which manifested itself in the actual or imagined success of Jews in winning sympathizers or converts to their ways.² Other commentators have objected to a restricted focus on religious motives and emphasized that the authorities acted on concerns about law and order.³ Jews were, after all, not the only group to be ordered to leave the city. Other collective expulsions – sometimes alongside Jews – are recorded for Egyptians, astrologers, philosophers, and actors.

1 I would like to thank Jan Bremmer, Martin Goodman, Erich Gruen, George van Kooten, Onno van Nijf, and Rens Tacoma for their valuable comments on pieces that predate this article. The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) funded the research for this study. Unless otherwise indicated, translations from the Bible are taken from the NRSV and those from classical authors are derived from the Loeb Classical Library, with minor alterations.

2 Peter Schäfer focuses on the “anti-Jewish” character of the actions in *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997). John Barclay relates the expulsions to concerns about an increasing Jewish influence in *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE - 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 306–307. Louis Feldman sees them as a response to Jewish missionary activity, see *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 92–102.

3 E.g., Leonard V. Rutgers, “Roman Policy toward the Jews: Expulsions from the City of Rome during the First Century CE,” in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (eds. Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson; Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, MA: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 93–116.

Whichever explanation for these expulsions one adopts, it must take into account the fact that the sources often do not articulate the precise background for taking action and that the practical consequences of the measures remain largely unclear. Given the apparent need to repeat expulsion orders and the continued presence of all of these groups in the city, the measure appears to have been quite ineffectual. The ineffectiveness of expulsions has been underlined in particular by Erich Gruen, who argued that these banning orders were not followed through but were of a symbolic character. In times of real or perceived crisis, the Roman establishment needed to reaffirm its commitment to ancient Roman values and distinguish these from alien practices. Jews and their conspicuous practices formed convenient scapegoats when the senate or the emperor wished to publicly polish their image: "the gesture alone mattered".⁴

Gruen's argument invites the question whether the notion of "power politics" might help in understanding something of the underlying reasons and effects of the expulsion orders that were passed against Jews and others. The notion of "power politics" traditionally belongs to realist approaches to international relations, where it denotes the self-interested competition between states for power and material resources.⁵ But constructivist scholars have called attention to the importance of the ideational and discursive assertion of power by means of rhetorical force rather than physical violence to promote order.⁶ This rhetorical dimension is also present in more colloquial uses of the term "power politics" as a pejorative label that signals a public display of potential power, the threat of violence or punishment, as well as political game-playing. Much like the cognate "gesture politics" or "symbolic politics", the term flags political decisions that are not necessarily based on real needs, convictions,

4 Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 15-19, 33-43. For criticism of Gruen's "optimistic" view of diaspora life, see Margaret H. Williams, "The Disciplining of the Jews of Ancient Rome: Pure Gesture Politics?," in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, vol. XV. *Collection Latomus* 323 (ed. Carl Deroux; Brussels: Éditions Latomus, 2010), 79-102.

5 The classic work is Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knop, 1948). Martin Wight's *Power Politics* (New York, NY: Holmes and Meier, 1946; rev. ed. 1978) includes an examination of the moral basis of ancient "state-systems" of Hellas and Persia but rejects the idea that the politics of these powers can be equated to power politics.

6 See, for instance, Janice Bially Mattern, "The Power Politics of Identity," *European Journal of International Relations* 7 (2001): 349-397. A similar shift towards ideology can be noted for scholarship on the Roman Empire. One example is Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Classics and Contemporary Thought 6; Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2000). I would like to thank Erin Wilson for her helpful comments about current developments in political theory.

or the expectation of substantive benefits but on ulterior motives such as electoral gain. Other concerns operate in addition to the often rhetorically charged justifications that seek to tilt the mood and influence public opinion.

It is this rhetorical dimension of the expulsion orders in ancient Rome that I will particularly focus on in this contribution. I begin by exploring the events under Tiberius and end with those under Claudius. Actors, philosophers, and astrologers populate the intermediate pages. Whereas the evidence for official actions against Jews is still often studied in isolation, I will argue that the *type* of groups that were occasionally subject to collective banishment orders is relevant to understanding the implications of the measure.⁷ What can be gleaned from the sources concerning the occasions, enforcement, and consequences of expulsion orders? After discussing the senatorial decree of 19 C.E. against Jewish and Egyptian rites (section 2), I suggest that expulsions were not collectively enforced but can be compared to other public notices that served as instruments of social control (section 3). The moral message that was sent out, as well as its potential effects, becomes evident when we look at expulsions issued against actors (section 4), philosophers (section 5), and astrologers (section 6). In this light, I consider anew the rhetoric employed in the senatorial decree of 19 C.E. (section 7), and finally examine how Claudius's expulsion of Jews accorded with his political program (section 8).

2. A Senatorial Decree against Egyptian and Jewish Cults

In 19 C.E., the Roman senate conducted a debate about “foreign ceremonies” in the city and passed a decree specifying measures to check the practice of Jewish and Egyptian cults. Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius each provide versions that differ to such an extent that it is difficult to see what the senatorial promulgation precisely entailed and against whom each measure was directed. Before entering into some of the details, their reports may be reconciled as follows. The senate decided to focus its repressive measures on Egyptian and Jewish rites.⁸ A *senatus consultum* ordered practitioners of these cults to give up their “impious rites” by a certain

7 I focus on groups against whom eviction orders were issued repeatedly under the Principate. For a brief overview of a few others, see David Noy, *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers* (London: Duckworth, 2000), 37–39.

8 Tacitus, *Annals* 2.85: *actum et de sacris Aegyptiis Iudaicisque pellendis*; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 36.1: *externas caerimonias, Aegyptios Iudaicosque ritus compescuit*. Note that Suetonius and Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.79, 83 place the initiative with Tiberius.

date and burn their religious objects.⁹ The penalty for disobedience was banishment from the city (Josephus, Suetonius) or from Italy (Tacitus).¹⁰ 4,000 male Jews of military age were conscripted and deployed to fight brigands on Sardinia.¹¹

Emperor and senate, so it seems, were primarily concerned with halting the practice of what they labelled as imported rites. The expulsion order was the consequence of disobedience: people had to leave “unless (*nisi*) before a certain day they had discarded their profane ceremonies” (*profanos ritus*; Tacitus, *Annals* 2.85).¹² The same decree probably caused Seneca to give up his youthful experiments with the Pythagorean vegetarian diet, as early in Tiberius’ reign, “foreign rites (*alienigena ... sacra*) were being stirred up, and abstinence from certain kinds of animal food was set down as among the marks of *superstitio*” and could result in a false accusation (*calumnia*; *Epistles* 108.22). It is possible that the order to leave the city was mainly intended for Jews; not because Romans did not think Jews capable of giving up their religious practices, but because these practices could not be stopped by burning “religious vestments and all paraphernalia” (*religiosas vestes cum instrumento omni*; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 36.1). This could also be the background for the remarkable mass “conscription” of serviceable Jewish men. Conscription could be a means to evict those Jews who held Roman citizenship, as Leonard Rutgers suggests.¹³ However, the number of 4,000 freedmen or their descendants on which Josephus and Tacitus agree is hardly credible, and the measure was without parallel.¹⁴

9 Tacitus, *Annals* 2.85: *nisi certam ante diem profanos ritus exuissent*; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 36.1: *coactis qui superstitione ea tenebantur religiosas vestes cum instrumento omni comburere*.

10 Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.83: καὶ ὁ Τιβέριος ... κελεύει πᾶν τὸ Ἰουδαϊκὸν τῆς Πρώμης ἀπελθεῖν; Tacitus, *Annals* 2.85: *ceteri cederent Italia*; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 36.1: *reliquos ... urbe summovit, sub poena perpetuae servitutis nisi obtemperassent*.

11 Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.84: οἱ δὲ ὕπατοι τετρακισχιλίου ἀνθρώπους ἐξ αὐτῶν στρατολογήσαντες ἔπεμψαν εἰς Σαρδῶ τὴν νῆσον πλείστους δὲ ἐκόλασαν μὴ θέλοντας στρατεύεσθαι διὰ φυλακὴν τῶν πατρῶν νόμων; Tacitus, *Annals* 2.85: *ut quattuor milia libertini generis ea superstitione infecta quis idonea aetas in insulam Sardiniam veherentur, coercendis illic latrocinis et, si ob gravitatem caeli interissent, vile damnum*; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 36.1: *Iudaeorum iuventutem per speciem sacramenti in provincias gravioris caeli distribuit*.

12 Translations of Tacitus’ *Annals* are drawn from A. J. Woodman, *Tacitus, The Annals: Translated with Introduction and Notes* (Indianapolis, IN and Cambridge, MA: Hackett, 2004).

13 Rutgers, “Roman Policy,” 104–105. For a full examination of the legal background, see Helga Botermann: “Die Maßnahmen gegen die stadtrömischen Juden im Jahre 19 n. Chr.,” *Historia* 52 (2003): 419–421.

14 Note, however, that the usual terminology for conscription is absent (*dilectus, supplementum, conscribere*). See Peter A. Brunt, “Conscription and Volunteering in the Roman Army,” *Scripta Israelica Classica* 1 (1974): 90–115; repr. in *Roman Imperial Themes* (Oxford: Clarendon

Josephus's report, in fact, is the only source in which the expulsion is described as a legal punishment for specific misdemeanors. The account is constructed with great care. Josephus presents a novelistic account in which he compares Tiberius's response to two scams of Roman ladies of good birth with an interest in "un-Roman" cults. Paulina, who was "very much given to the worship of Isis" (θεραπεία τῆς Ἰσιδος σφόδρα ὑπηγμένην; *Jewish Antiquities* 18.70), was lured into spending the night in the temple of Isis with an admirer named Mundus, who bribed some Isis priests and disguised himself as the god Anubis. Tiberius, informed by Paulina's husband Saturninus, instituted a thorough investigation, ordered that the temple of Isis be destroyed and her cult statue thrown into the Tiber, and inflicted the proper legal punishments on those involved (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.65–80). Then Josephus goes on to relate the "sad calamity that had put the Jews of Rome in disorder". A criminal Jew, claiming expertise in the Mosaic law, attempted together with some associates to steal the Temple donation of the matron Fulvia, "who had gone over to the Jewish ordinances" (νομίμοις προσεληλυθυῖαν τοῖς Ἰουδαϊκοῖς).¹⁵ Tiberius, informed – again – by a husband named Saturninus, ordered the expulsion of all Jews from Rome (*Jewish Antiquities* 81–84).

Josephus clearly intends to demonstrate the incongruity of Tiberius's response and the innocence of the larger Jewish population of Rome. In making this point, he draws on different novelistic themes and common tropes of Roman morality.¹⁶ The story of Mundus and Paulina resembles the legend of the paternity of Alexander the Great, as found in the *Alexander Romance*. The long excursus on Paulina's nightly affair with Mundus-as-Anubis affirms the stereotypical Roman concern about foreign cults as sites of transgressive sexuality, while the self-appointed exegete of the Mosaic law fulfils the role of the fraudulent foreign religious expert. Therefore, most commentators rightly do not take Josephus's narrative at face value as the background for the senatorial decree.¹⁷ There are no other reports

Press, 1990); cf. Samuel Rocca, "Josephus, Suetonius, and Tacitus on the Military Service of the Jews of Rome: Discrimination or Norm?" *Italia* 20 (2010): 7–30.

15 Note that Tacitus seems most disturbed by converts sending money to Jerusalem: *Histories* 5.5.1. Both Tacitus and Josephus wrote at a time when funds originally destined for the Jerusalem temple had been redirected to Rome.

16 Josephus's use of Roman tropes in this account is discussed by Shelley Matthews, *First Converts: Rich Pagan Women and the Rhetoric of Mission in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Contraversions; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 10–50.

17 Rutgers, "Roman Policy," 99–100; Gruen, *Diaspora*, 91; but cf. the recent studies of Williams, "The Disciplining of the Jews of Ancient Rome," 98–90, and Botermann, "Die Maßnahmen gegen die stadtrömischen Juden," 430–432.

about a destruction of the temple of Isis around this time. Josephus is also the only source to mention the involvement of Isis: Tacitus and Suetonius speak of actions against Egyptian rites, which is not quite the same thing. As I further describe below, Josephus's account can be read as a creative narrative response to the version of the events that circulated in Rome or that Josephus encountered in his sources or archives in the form of the *senatus consultum*, which is also reflected in Tacitus's and Suetonius's reports.

Roman Attraction to Judaism?

If Josephus's account is largely fictional, what then motivated the senate and emperor to take action? Edith Mary Smallwood and many others related the actions in question to the successful proselytizing efforts of Jews: "the majority, therefore, of the Jews in Rome, together with the most ardent of their gentile converts, were driven from their homes in 19 because their proselytizing activities had reached dimensions at which they were regarded as a menace to the Roman order."¹⁸ Even though most scholars no longer assume that Jews were engaged in missionary activities, the underlying reasons for the official actions under Tiberius are still sought in Roman anxiety about the growing influence of Jews and other foreign elements on the Roman population.¹⁹

This understanding of Tiberius's actions is influenced by our latest source for the episode, a fragment from Cassius Dio's third-century *Roman History* which was preserved only by the seventh-century author John of Antioch: "As the Jews had flocked to Rome in great numbers and were converting [or: introducing] many of the locals to their own customs (συχνοῦς τῶν

18 Edith Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian* (Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 20; Leiden, Brill, 1976), 208. Smallwood believes that Jewish religion caught on because "many Romans were finding that the formal state religion and the humble domestic cults failed to satisfy their spiritual and emotional needs". See also Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, 94; John Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 58-59; Menachem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (3 vols.; Fontes ad Res Judaicas Spectantes; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1976-1984), 2: 70; Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (updated edition; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 18-19.

19 Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 306-307. See also Schäfer, *Judeophobia*, 191-193. The case against Jewish proselytism was made by Martin D. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Edouard Will and Claude Orrieux, *Prosélytisme juif? Histoire d'une erreur* (Histoire 11; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1992).

ἐπιχωρίων ἐς τὰ σφέτερα ἔθνη μεθιστάντων), he banished most of them" (57.18.5; frg. 79).²⁰

Despite the uncertainties surrounding the textual history of the passage, it is accepted as an indication that in 19 C.E. Roman authorities resisted Roman conversion to Judaism or even active attempts by Jews to spread their ways. In this light, Tacitus's reference to people "infected with that superstition" (*ea superstitione infecta*) is taken as an unmistakable sign that people who were not born Jewish were involved. Similarly, Suetonius is thought to distinguish born Jews from converts to Judaism when he mentions "those of the same people or of similar affiliations" (*reliquos gentis eiusdem vel similia sectantes*).²¹ These rather unspecific descriptions certainly suggest that the original *senatus consultum* presented the influence of foreign cultic practices as an issue of concern. The religious interests of Josephus's ladies of good birth confirm this reading of the events. We do not need to deny that Jewish rituals and traditions, along with the cults of Egyptian gods such as Isis and Serapis, exerted a certain appeal in various forms and degrees of intensity throughout Roman society. What is not clear, however, is whether this concern over the influence of foreign cultic practices was the direct reason for intervening or rather provided the rhetoric that underpinned the action. We will see that similar notions about the corrupting influence of actors, philosophers, and astrologers on proper Roman behavior supported the expulsion orders that were issued against these groups.

It is unlikely that Roman authorities felt compelled to penalize this religious behavior by large-scale repressive action. The exclusion of foreigners from the capital and the connotations of xenophobia this carries do not sit comfortably alongside Rome's willingness to adopt foreign practices and cults. Rome prided itself on welcoming people and their gods from across the *oikoumene* into the Roman community. This "ideology of the open city" was an important part of Rome's self-image. Roman citizenship was relatively permeable, and non-Roman religious practices had been incorporated

20 Dio often mentions large numbers as the background for collective expulsions: the *lex Papia* banished resident aliens "because they were becoming too numerous" (37.9.5); Augustus feared the revolt of many Germans and Gauls following the defeat of Varus and ordered them to leave (56.23.4); whereas Claudius did not expel Jews in 41 C.E. because there were too many of them (60.6.6).

21 Margaret H. Williams does not rely on Dio but still sees proselytes in Tacitus and Suetonius: "The Expulsion of the Jews from Rome in A.D. 19," *Latomus* 48 (1989): 769-770. Ernest L. Abel argues that only converts were expelled in order to remove them from Jewish influence, but this would leave Jews in Rome to win more converts: "Were the Jews banished from Rome in 19 A.D.?", *Revue des Études Juives* 127 (1968): 338-386.

from the early Republic onwards.²² If the presence of “foreign” cults did not itself evoke official actions, we need to consider internal political affairs to understand the background of the expulsion order.

Family Matters

What was happening in 19 C.E.? Since our sources offer so few clues, only indirect inferences can be drawn. Erich Gruen suggests that the timing may be connected with popular unrest over the fate of Tiberius’s adopted son Germanicus. The expected heir incurred a mysterious and fatal illness during his travels through the East, for which his opponent Cn. Calpurnius Piso was blamed and later condemned to death. Even before Germanicus’s death, rumors about malicious magic and poisoning circulated in the capital and suspicion was cast on the emperor himself, whose envy of his nephew was common knowledge (Tacitus, *Annals* 2.83). To calm the people and appease the gods, as Gruen cautiously conjectures, Tiberius shaped his public posture by distancing the Roman establishment from alien practices associated with the East and declaring their practices unwanted.²³ Gruen refers to a similar incident that occurred three years earlier. In the wake of Libo Drusus’s treasonous consultation of astrologers and dream-interpretters, the senate expelled all astrologers from the capital.²⁴ However, if the expulsion order of 19 C.E. followed a similar logic, we would expect it to be directed against magicians or poisoners, corresponding to the nature of the alleged crime. Another option is to consider the role of suspected treacherous behavior on Germanicus’s part earlier that year during his controversial visit to Egypt.

Much to Tiberius’s dismay, Germanicus had not sought the imperial permission that was required of senators and equestrians who wished to enter the imperial domain of Egypt (Tacitus, *Annals* 2.59). Whether or not with revolutionary intent, Germanicus made himself wildly popular with the Alexandrian crowd and was welcomed, as attested by papyri, as

22 The term “ideology of the open city” was coined by Eric M. Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome: Creating a Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). See further Emma Dench, *Romulus’ Asylum: Roman Identities from the Age of Alexander to the Age of Hadrian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 93–151. Dench warns against overemphasizing Rome’s open character and locates these assertions in their rhetorical context.

23 Gruen, *Diaspora*, 32–34.

24 Tacitus, *Annals* 2.27–32; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 36.2; Dio 57.15.8.

“Savior and Benefactor of all humanity.”²⁵ He not only lowered the price of grain, but also:

adopted many habits welcome to the public – walking around without soldiery, his feet uncovered, and in an attire identical with that of the Greeks (*pedibus intectis et pari cum Graecis amictu*), in emulation of P. Scipio, who we have heard used to do the same things on Sicily, although the war with the Poeni was still blazing. Tiberius, after a mildly scathing reference to his style and clothing, berated him very sharply because, contrary to the established usage of Augustus, he had gone into Alexandria without the princeps’s consent. (Tacitus, *Annals* 2.59)

Germanicus behaved as a Greek among Greeks. Tiberius is said to have responded with only “mildly scathing reference” while severely reproaching him for entering Egypt unauthorized. Tacitus’s entire report appears to reflect Roman court polemics against Germanicus and his activities in the East. The nature of this polemic is suggested by the parallel that is drawn between Germanicus’s conduct in Alexandria and that of Scipio Africanus in Syracuse (in 204 B.C.E.), who was lambasted by his political enemies for not fulfilling his military duties in the Second Punic War but instead immersing himself in Greek life. For this, he was:

taunted with his style of dress as being un-Roman (*non Romanus modo*) and even unsoldierly. It was asserted that he walked about the gymnasium in a Greek cloak and sandals; that he spent his time amongst rhetoricians and athletes; and that his entire cohort was enjoying the pleasures of Syracuse with equal effeminacy (*molliter*). (Livy 29.19.11)²⁶

These accusations, uttered in the senate, were aimed at discrediting Scipio as unpatriotic, “Greek,” and hence effete (*mollis*). Germanicus appears to have suffered the same moralizing reproaches for transgressing the dress and behavioral code of a Roman statesman. If the senatorial decree against foreign rites of 19 C.E. can be related to Germanicus’s whereabouts in the East, we may understand it as sending out a message that emphasized the undesirability of the adoption of foreign ways by ordinary Romans and princes alike. A connection with Germanicus’s activities in Egypt, just like

25 Robin Seager, *Tiberius* (2nd rev. ed.; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 87–88.

26 See also Valerius Maximus 3.6.1; Plutarch, *Cato the Elder* 3.7.

his death in Syrian Antioch, also begins to explain why the senate and the emperor singled out the rites of Egyptians and Jews.²⁷

While these insights provide us with some explanation as to why the expulsion orders were made, they nonetheless leave unanswered the question of the consequences of the measure. The reports of Tacitus and Suetonius probably paraphrase a *senatus consultum* from the archives and therefore reflect the decision that had been made about what should occur, not necessarily what actually did occur. We do not know how or whether the practice of these foreign rites was searched out and identified. Jews may have kept a low profile for a while, but there are no traces that suggest a large-scale departure. The activities surrounding the Jewish embassies to Caligula and Claudius do not suggest that Jewish life in Rome had been seriously disrupted, and Philo feels comfortable in (virtually) skipping over them in the interest of his favorable portrayal of Tiberius.²⁸ This is not to say that the decree was without effect: Seneca did give up his vegetarian diet and, for his own reasons, Josephus made the effort to create his own version of the events, even though he could have omitted them from his history altogether.²⁹

3. The Practicalities of Expulsion Orders

A Significant Silence

The lack of evidence concerning the practical consequences of these and other collective banning orders has implications for how to understand the purpose and character of the measure as a political action. There are no sources that report how Roman authorities proceeded after it had been

27 For Jews as Syrians, see for instance Ovid, *Art of Love* 1.76, 416.

28 Philo possibly alludes to the episode when he reports on how Tiberius reversed Sejanus's calumnies by promising that only the guilty would be punished (*Embassy* 159-161). This insistence is reminiscent of Josephus's complaint that Tiberius punished all Jews for the misdeeds of a few and possibly represents (Roman) Jewish memory of the events. A similar observation is made by Maren Niehof, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture* (Studies in Ancient Judaism 86; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 124.

29 The impact of Claudius's expulsion was apparently minimal enough for Josephus – writing in Rome – to pass over it without losing credibility. He had literary and rhetorical reasons for not mentioning the expulsion: it would interrupt his narrative of Claudius's beneficence towards Jews and the successful intermediary role of the Jewish king Agrippa II, and disrupt his geographical focus on Judaea. This focus only diverts to Alexandria and Dora to report imperial decisions in favor of Jews.

announced that a certain group was no longer wanted in Rome.³⁰ Did officials actively seek to remove the people involved, or was the decision merely posted? Were philosophers, teaching in public with beard and cloak, picked up off the streets?³¹ Were astrologers caught in the act of telling someone's future? Should we imagine that Romans barged into Roman synagogues or prayer houses on a given Saturday, assembled all the people who happened to be present, and chased them out of the city?³²

While these scenarios are imaginable, and there were perhaps ways in which large numbers of people could be deported from the city, the fact is that we are told nothing about this in the surviving evidence. Rome did not have the adequate machinery for the detection of crime. Enforcement of legal rulings largely depended on individual denunciation by private informers and accusers.³³ It seems significant that juridical procedures do not crop up as part of the enforcement of expulsion orders. There are no reports of trials where those with citizenship protested their expulsion, or where it was investigated whether someone who had been brought in was indeed a philosopher, a Jew, or an Egyptian. We do know of comparable cases where individuals were accused of treason for consulting astrologers and were condemned to exile, but not in the context of a general expulsion.³⁴ These trials usually involved members of the elite, which makes them more prone to end up in our literary sources. But we can also think of Suetonius's famous anecdote that illustrated Domitian's strict levy of the *fiscus Judaicus*. The emperor had an old man examined in court to see whether he was

30 For an imaginative account of the panic that broke out after an expulsion order of Macedonians, see Appian, *Macedonian Affairs* 11.9; cf. Polybius 27.6; Livy 42.48.

31 Cf. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 7.4: "some philosophers tried to escape persecution by casting off their dress".

32 Most Jews, as Shaye J. D. Cohen notes, were not distinguishable from others by looks, clothing, speech, names, or profession. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Hellenistic Culture and Society 31; Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 28–37.

33 This is Saturninus's role in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.66, 83. On the hypothetical role of informers in enforcing expulsions, see John P. V. D. Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens* (London: Duckworth, 1979), 98: "the state must have depended on the common informer, the keen young prosecutor"; David Noy proposes "a mixture of targeting well-known figures and denunciation of individuals by neighbors and customers": *Foreigners at Rome*, 47. On the forces responsible for enforcing law and order, see now Christopher Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire: Soldiers, Administration, and Public Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

34 Aemilia Lepida was charged with adultery, poisoning, and consulting astrologers in 20 C.E. (Tacitus, *Annals* 3.22; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 49.1). Scribonianus was exiled on similar charges in 52 C.E. (Tacitus, *Annals* 12.52). Legal restrictions that provided grounds for these condemnations were already in place (see note 77 below).

circumcised and so tested his affiliation (*Domitian* 12.2). When people were denounced as “Christians” to Pliny, he examined their affiliation in court (*Epistles* 10.96). The *Christiani* who were blamed for the fire of Rome in 64 C.E. may not have received a formal or fair trial, but from this incident we do learn that they were arrested, tried, and convicted (*Tacitus, Annals* 15.44).

Posting Expulsion Orders

What, then, was the purpose of these collective banning orders and how were they communicated? Perhaps our best indication is offered by an expulsion of astrologers by the new emperor Vitellius. Shortly after arriving in Rome in 69 C.E., Vitellius issued an *edictum* in which he ordered the astrologers to leave the city and Italy before the calends of October (*Suetonius, Vitellius* 14.4).³⁵ The edict may have served to put a stop to rumors circulating about the favorable horoscope of Vitellius’s competitor Vespasian.³⁶ In any case, the astrologers were not impressed. They immediately put up a notice themselves (*statim libellus propositus est*), reading:

By proclamation of the Chaldaeans, *bonum factum!* Before the same day and date let Vitellius Germanicus have ceased to live (*Chaldaeos edicere, bonum factum, ne Vitellius Germanicus intra eundem Kalendarum diem usquam esset*). (*Suetonius, Vitellius* 14.4)

This anecdote comes closest to a form of protest to an expulsion by the group involved. We do not know whether some individual astrologers were indeed banished, but the incident does suggest something about the way in which expulsion orders could be communicated. By putting up their *libellus*, the astrologers reciprocated the posting of the imperial *edictum* (the term *propositus* is used for publishing pronouncements in writing).³⁷ Imperial edicts were usually posted in public at the imperial residence,

35 Dio reports that Vitellius, upon reaching Rome, put up a πρόγραμμα that expelled the astrologers, and commanded them to leave Italy entirely by a certain specified day (64.1.4). Tacitus, *Histories* 2.62 mentions the action alongside a prohibition of Roman *equites* from “polluting themselves” in gladiatorial schools and the arena. Both intended to reform the morals of the Roman elite (see below).

36 As suggested by Pauline Ripat, “Expelling Misconceptions: Astrology at Rome,” *Classical Philology* 106 (2011): 115–154.

37 The Greek term used by Dio, πρόγραμμα, also specifies the public posting of an edict: Marco Stroppa, “Il termine ‘programma’ della documentazione papiracea dell’Egitto Romano,” *Aegyptus* 84 (2004): 177–197.

the magistrate's office, or other frequently visited locations. They could be copied and posted in other cities, but this is hardly to be expected in the case of local actions against specific groups.³⁸ The vast majority of public announcements, whether senatorial, consular, or imperial, have not survived, as they were transmitted orally or written on the perishable white-painted boards (*tabulae dealbatae*) that were used for quick and public communication with the people.³⁹ In addition to public posting, these pronouncements could also be communicated by criers or through the city gazette that was published on placards and contained excerpts of *senatus consulta*, news about the imperial family, and announcements of imperial benefactions.⁴⁰

Some of these proclamations specifically served to quell unrest and influence public opinion. One very clear instance is a proclamation that was issued by Claudius at the instigation of Agrippina. She, so Dio tells us, wanted to ensure that the populace regarded her son Nero as Claudius's only legitimate successor. To that purpose, Agrippina "persuaded Claudius to make known to the populace by declamation and to the senate by letter that, if he should die, Nero was already capable of administering the business of the State" (Dio 61.33.11). Agrippina had first instigated a popular riot over the sale of bread, which would require some kind of imperial intervention. The public notice (προγραφή) was meant to restore order and assure the people of the prospect of a new ruler who would take care of their needs.

There are many examples of *senatus consulta* and imperial edicts that were issued to call the people to order without the intervention of policing forces. Moreover, some of these public notices served to reform the people's behavior and so adopted the terminology of moral rebuke.⁴¹ Moralizing senatorial decisions and consular edicts were published when

38 See esp. Werner Eck, "Öffentlichkeit, Politik und Administration. Epigraphische Dokumente von Kaisern, Senat und Amtsträgern in Rom," in *Selbstdarstellung und Kommunikation: Die Veröffentlichung staatlicher Urkunde auf Stein und Bronze in der römischen Welt* (ed. R. Haensch; München: C.H. Beck, 2009), 75–96. Before Decius's reign, local actions against the Christian cult were given shape by posting copies of imperial *rescripta* that responded to local petitions of governors or cities. Eusebius relates how such an edict was pulled down and torn up: *Ecclesiastical History* 8.5. For a discussion, see Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World, 31 BC – AD 337* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 551–577.

39 Eck, "Öffentlichkeit, Politik und Administration," 81.

40 On communication of legislation and the dissemination of political news, see Anne Kolb, "Wege der Übermittlung politischer Inhalte im Alltag Roms," in *Propaganda – Selbstdarstellung: Repräsentation im römischen Kaiserreich des 1. Jh. n Chr.* (eds. Gregor Weber and Martin Zimmermann; Historia 164; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003), 127–144.

41 Most examples are from Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World*, 252–259.

riots threatened to break out during a corn shortage in 32 C.E.: “to castigate the plebs (*castiganda plebi*), a senate’s decision was composed with old-time severity (*prisca severitate*), and the consuls were no more sluggish with an edict” (Tacitus, *Annals* 6.13). Nero took similar action when he “berated the people in an edict” (*populum edicto increpuit*)” when the crowds protested against a mass execution of slaves (Tacitus, *Annals* 14.45). And when the Roman people called for the punishment of Tigellinus, Galba “issued an edict rebuking the people for their cruelty” (*saevitiae populum edicto increpuit*; Suetonius, *Galba* 15.2). A final example from outside the city of Rome is a proconsular edict that was issued to stop a baker’s strike at Ephesus (*I. Eph.* 215; ca. 150 C.E.). The welfare of the city would be best served, the proconsul explained, not by punishing the troublemakers but by “bringing them to their senses by means of an edict”.⁴² Expulsion orders may be understood along similar lines. Without being actively and thoroughly enforced, they served as instruments of social control intended to quell unrest or to propagate a message of moral reform.

4. Evicting Actors: Expulsions as Moral Reform

That expulsion orders could communicate moral censure becomes clear if we now look at some of the groups against which collective eviction orders were issued. We will start with actors, who were told to leave the city under Tiberius, Nero, and Trajan.⁴³ The theatre was a notorious hotbed of popular disorder. The musical and dance performances of the mimes and pantomimes (*pantomimi* or *histriones*) were the most popular and the most controversial form of theatrical entertainment. Pantomime players were blamed for egging on the crowds with their dances, speeches, and songs full of political insinuations and sexual innuendo. Pantomime competitions were prone to result in fights between supporting factions that had to be put down by official intervention. When a riot resulted in bloodshed in 15 C.E., the senate permitted the praetors to punish unruly spectators and actors with banishment, although some senators proposed that the players should be scourged (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.77). Banishment was also set for improper

42 Transl. Allan C. Johnson et al., *Ancient Roman Statutes* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1961), no. 257. Johnston notes that “this is perhaps one of the most unrealistic, overoptimistic, and pitiable sentences in Roman legal documents” (p. 213).

43 For a deportation of mime artists under Commodus, see *Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Commodus Antoninus* 3.4.

behavior by individual actors offstage, especially when they compromised the reputation of members of the elite.⁴⁴

A collective expulsion order was first issued in 23 C.E. following renewed complaints by the praetors about the intemperate conduct (*immodestia*) of the players. Tiberius's speech before the senate shows that the political disorder (*seditio*) of which they were accused was rhetorically linked to their moral misbehavior:

Their assaults in public (*in publicum seditiose*) were many and mutinous, he said, while those in houses were simply foul (*foeda per domos*); the old Oscan farce, the trivial delight of the crowd (*levissimae apud vulgum oblectationis*), had reached such a pitch of indecency and violence (*flagitiorum et virium*) that it must be checked by the fathers' authority. Actors were then expelled from Italy (*pulsi tum histriones Italia*). (Tacitus, *Annals* 4.14)⁴⁵

The accusations are cast in highly moralizing vocabulary. The actors are accused of not only inciting public sedition (*seditio*), but also private disgrace or defilement (*foeda*) and, by serving the fickle (*levis*) crowd, stirring up acts of indecency (*flagitium*) and violence (*vis*). Cassius Dio connects the expulsion not only with the actor's capacity to stir up disorder (στάσις) but also with the shame they brought on women (57.21.3).⁴⁶ The collective expulsion order was issued, so it seems, in response to unrest but it was supported with reference to the perceived corruptive effect of actors on the morals of Rome's population.

Another example of the moralizing context in which expulsions of actors were issued comes from Pliny's lavish praise of Trajan in the *Panegyricus*. A good emperor, according to Pliny, also acted as a moral teacher and a perpetual censor. He applauds Trajan as the first emperor who was truly successful at removing the pantomime dancers, since he had reformed the

44 Augustus banished Stephanio because he was waited on by a Roman matron "with hair cut short to look like a boy", and Pylades "was expelled from the city and from Italy as well (*urbe atque Italia summovertit*), because by pointing at him with his finger he turned all eyes upon a spectator who was hissing him" (Suetonius, *Augustus* 45.4). After the riots of 15 C.E., senators were prohibited from entering the house of pantomime artists and Roman *equites* were not to escort them when leaving (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.77). It was apparently undesirable that the upper class was seen with performers in public.

45 Suetonius notes that the leaders of the supporting factions and the unruly actors were banished (*Tiberius* 37.2).

46 On the intertwined discourses of political and sexual licence, see Catherine Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 128-130.

mores of the people to such an extent that they now disapproved of the art themselves:

And so the same populace which once watched and applauded the performances of an actor-emperor has now even turned against the professional mimes, and damns their perverted art as a taste unworthy of our age (*damnat effeminates artes et indecora saeculo studia*). This shows that even the vulgar crowd can take a lesson from its rulers, since a reform so sweeping, if once started by an individual, can spread to all. (Pliny, *Panegyricus* 46.3-4)

An emperor's character is here measured by his stance towards actors. Trajan managed to successfully end the licentiousness of the theatre, not by *vis et imperium* as his predecessors did, but by his own moral example (*Panegyricus* 46.5). Conversely, the "bad" emperor Nero set the ultimate bad moral example by appearing on the stage. He, too, attempted to curb the dissension of the theatrical crowd in 56 C.E. by expelling actors, although Tacitus remarks that he was responsible for causing the disorder (*Annals* 13.25; Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2).

To understand why actors were subject to collective expulsion orders, we need to consider the highly contentious position of acting and the theatre in Roman society. The theatre was of central importance as a political arena where power relations could be both affirmed and challenged, where elites demonstrated their generosity, and where social hierarchies were reflected and reproduced in the seating arrangements.⁴⁷ Hartmut Leppin's study of the social location of performers shows that some of them achieved great fame and had great influence at the imperial court.⁴⁸ However, the legal position of actors was marginal: performers were usually slaves or *peregrini* (such as the Alexandrian Bathyllus, the Cilician Pylades, and the Jew Aliturus). Acting was among the shameful professions that were considered incompatible

47 On Augustus's *lex Iulia theatralis*, see Suetonius, *Augustus* 44 and E. Rawson, "Discrimina ordinum: The *lex Iulia theatralis*," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 55 (1987): 83-114; on structuring Roman society in the theatre, see Paul Zanker, *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* (München: C.H. Beck, 1987), 151-156.

48 Hartmut Leppin, *Histrionen: Untersuchungen zur sozialen Stellung von Bühnenkünstlern im Westen der Römischen Reiches während der Republik und des Principats* (Antiquitas I 41; Bonn: Rudolf Habelt Verlag, 1992); and a shorter version in "Between Marginality and Celebrity: Entertainers and Entertainments in Roman Society," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World* (ed. Michael Peachin; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 660-678. See also the doctoral thesis of Johannes E. Spruit, *De juridische en sociale positie der Romeinse acteurs* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1966).

with the dignity and honor of senators and equestrians. Citizens who took to the stage were subject to *infamia*, the legal brand of disgrace that entailed a severe loss of privileges.⁴⁹ Roman law reflected and reinforced the attitudes of Roman moralists who associated the theatre with softness, effeminacy, wantonness, and uproar.⁵⁰ Despite its central location in Roman society, it was considered very Roman to present acting as profoundly un-Roman.

It seems that Rome's preoccupation with acting can be partly explained by the theatre's potential as a site for the contestation of social and political power. Catherine Edwards has suggested that this potential presented actors and members of the elite with the opportunity to question the official hierarchy, precisely because their marginality offered a certain licence to disrupt.⁵¹ However, it was not just their perceived and sometimes paraded immorality that got actors expelled: not all of the legally and socially marginal groups that could be presented as immoral in various ways were subject to collective expulsion orders. It seems relevant that acting could still be presented as a foreign import. Livy, for instance, notes that drama was an imported innovation from Etruria that contradicted the "warlike character of the Roman people" (7.2.3-4). When Nero instituted the Greek-styled Neronia, some senators complained that this "imported licentiousness" would corrupt the youth through "foreign inclinations" (*studiis externis*) (Tacitus, *Annals* 14.20). This imputed foreignness does not itself explain Roman anxiety about acting. Edwards rightly remarks that "we should be cautious before accepting at face value a Roman author's assertion that something is foreign ... To describe something as 'foreign' and 'extravagant' was as much an expression of distrust as an explanation of why distrust was felt."⁵²

The "foreignness" of actors is not made explicit in the expulsion orders, but this is the common denominator amongst the groups against which expulsion orders were issued from time to time. While there was a range of groups that could be charged with subversion and sedition, actors, philosophers,

49 See Leppin, *Histrionen*, 71-83. A much-discussed *senatus consultum* of 19 C.E. imposed severe penalties on senators and equestrians who appeared on the stage or in the arena; see Wolfgang D. Lebek, "Standeswürde und Berufsverbot unter Tiberius: Das SC der Tabula Larinas," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 81 (1990): 37-96; Barbara Levick, "The *senatus consultum* from Larinum," *Journal of Roman Studies* 73 (1983): 97-115.

50 As observed by Edwards, *Politics of Immorality*, 98-136 esp. 99.

51 Edwards, *Politics of Immortality*, 127-136; see also Leppin, "Between Marginality and Celebrity," 673, who explains: "precisely the fact that they could exercise influence over the political life of the community at an 'improper' junction made them dangerous in the eyes of the elite".

52 Edwards, *Politics of Immorality*, 100.

and astrologers share the possibility of being portrayed as having come from outside. Ascriptions of foreignness had a strong rhetorical force in Roman conceptions of morality and immorality. Luxury, effeminacy, and homosexuality were conceived as eastern imports that corrupted traditional morality. This moral rhetoric often served to explain (and create) crises in Roman society, and it seems to lie behind expulsion orders.⁵³ Issued in response to unrest and disorder, these orders may well have resulted in the individual banishment of some actors or unruly supporters. More importantly, by ordering all actors to remove themselves from Rome's boundaries, the authorities communicated a message of moral reform that underlined the distinction between acting and proper Roman behavior.

5. Leaving Rome: Philosophical Fame in Face of Power

In the previous sections on the practicalities of expulsion orders and those issued against actors, we have begun to approach expulsions as assertions of power by means of rhetorical force rather than physical violence. This is not to say that collective eviction orders were without effect. The best known instance of a departure from Rome in the wake of an expulsion, that of Prisca and Aquila, will be discussed in the last section of this study. If anonymous troublemakers were banished in the context of a collective expulsion, they have left no trace in the historical record. We do hear of some notorious individuals – whose continued presence would attract attention – who retreated from public life in the city. The most substantial evidence concerns philosophers who left Rome after Domitian issued a general expulsion order most likely in 93 C.E.⁵⁴ This event has left a relatively strong impression in our sources, probably because it reflected the emperor's troublesome relationship with the senatorial class that is also responsible for much of the surviving literary production of the period. Domitian's expulsion of

53 Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 329-345.

54 For discussion of the date, see Adrian N. Sherwin-White, "Pliny's Praetorship Again," *Journal of Roman Studies* 47 (1995): 126-130. The expulsion is mentioned in Tacitus, *Life of Agricola* 2; Suetonius, *Domitianus* 10.3; Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 15.11.3; Dio 67.13.3; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 7.4; 15.11.3; Athenaeus 13.610-611. Gunnar Haaland has suggested that this expulsion motivated Josephus to redefine the relationship between Judaism and philosophy in *Against Apion*: "Josephus and the Philosophers of Rome: Does *Contra Apionem* Mirror Domitian's Crushing of the 'Stoic Opposition?'," in *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond* (eds. Joseph Sievers and Gaia Lembi; JSJSup 104; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 297-316.

philosophers was used to support portrayals of the emperor as a stock tyrant, an image that was reinforced during the Nervan-Antonian dynasty.⁵⁵

What were the reasons for ordering all philosophers to leave the city? The expulsion coincided with the trials of several members of the senatorial elite who, under the flag of Stoicism, opposed Domitian's monarchical style. The senators Junius Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio were executed on grounds of treason (*maiestas*) for publishing the biographies of Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus, who had headed the so-called "Stoic opposition" to Nero and suffered exile and execution.⁵⁶ It was "on the occasion of this charge" (*cuius criminis occasione*), says Suetonius, "that Domitian expelled all the philosophers from the city and from Italy" (*philosophos omnis urbe Italiaque summovit; Domitianus* 10.3). It seems, therefore, that Domitian's expulsion of philosophers was part of his attempt to crush senatorial opposition. He did not intend to remove the assortment of philosophical professionals who earned an income by teaching in elite houses or on the streets, nor was he motivated by anxiety about philosophy as such. Rather it provided a pretext to remove those elites who dared to criticize the ruling power from under the philosopher's cloak of liberty.

Some philosophers indeed appear to have left the city. The clearest example is Artemidorus, the son-in-law of Helvidius Priscus, who resided "in the suburbs" after Domitian's general ban. In a letter to a mutual friend, Pliny brags about the risk he took in visiting Artemidorus:

Our friend Artemidorus has so much goodness of heart that he always exaggerates the services his friends render him, and hence, in my case, though it is true that I have done him a good turn, he speaks of it in far too glowing language. When the philosophers were banished from the city I was with him in the suburbs, and the visit was the more talked about – that is, dangerous – because I was praetor at the time (*equidem, cum essent philosophi ab urbe summoti, fui apud illum in suburbano, et quo notabilius – hoc est, periculosius – esset fui praetor*). (Pliny, *Epistles* 3.11.2)

Pliny's claim about the risk he took in visiting his friend – even though as praetor he was expected to carry out legal rulings – could suggest that

55 For the senatorial construction of Domitian as a "bad emperor", see Brian W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London: Routledge, 1992), 124-125, 154.

56 Among the vast literature on the "Stoic opposition," see esp. Miriam T. Griffin, "Philosophy, Politics, and Politicians at Rome," in *Philosophia Togata I: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society* (eds. Jonathan Barnes and Miriam T. Griffin; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 1-37. Earlier ideas about an active opposition of Stoic and Cynic street philosophers are now largely abandoned.

there was some kind of enforcement of the order to ensure that notorious philosophers, at least, left the city or kept a low profile on its outskirts.⁵⁷ The letter writer undoubtedly exaggerated his own boldness in order to align himself with Artemidorus and other members of the opposition. However, in reality, Pliny had not suspended his career under Domitian and this now compromised his senatorial dignity.⁵⁸ All references to the general expulsion of philosophers under Domitian stem from the peaceful era of Nerva and Trajan, when Domitian's memory had been damned and people looked back and further magnified his reign of terror. Those who had opposed him and suffered persecution were the heroes of that time: a true philosopher would have been exiled and suffered from the general proscription.

This perspective of hindsight should also be taken into account for the departures of the philosophers Epictetus and Apollonius of Tyana. Epictetus moved from Rome to Nicopolis to set up his school, a move that the second-century grammarian Aulus Gellius associated with Domitian's ban. In a discussion of late Republican opposition to Greek teaching, he observes that

even in the reign of Domitian by a decree of the senate they were driven from the city and forbidden Italy. And it was at that time that the philosopher Epictetus also withdrew from Rome to Nicopolis because of that senatorial decree (*qua tempestate Epictetus quoque philosophus propter id senatusconsultum Nicopolim Roma decessit*). (Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 15.11.3)

Whether it was indeed specifically Domitian's ban in the early 90s that led Epictetus to leave Rome is not entirely clear.⁵⁹ In this case, however, the alleged victim of expulsion left his own writings (through Arrian's notes), which offer the possibility to explore the effects that an expulsion

57 On the *suburbium*, see Robert E. Witcher, "The Extended Metropolis: Urbs, Suburbium and Population," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 18 (2005): 120-138. I owe this reference to Saskia Stevens, who alerted me to the absence of specifications of Rome's boundaries in the sources for expulsions.

58 For Pliny's self-praise in this letter, see Jo-Ann Shelton, "Pliny's Letter 3.11: Rhetoric and Autobiography," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 38 (1987): 121-139. There is epigraphic evidence for Pliny's prefecture of the military treasury during the last years of Domitian's rule, despite his own claim to have retreated from public life (*Panegyricus* 95.3-4).

59 Aulus Gellius is our only source. The repeated mention of a *senatus consultum* is in deliberate support of his point about traditional Roman opposition to Greek learning. See also Fergus Millar, "Epictetus and the Imperial Court," *Journal of Roman Studies* 55 (1965): 141-148; repr. in *Rome, the Greek World, and the East*. Vol. 2. (eds. Hanna M. Cotton and Guy M. Rogers; Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

order could have on a member of the group involved. Epictetus – who was not a member of the senatorial elite – does not relate his exile to his own precarious position under Domitian. His *Discourses* do reflect extensively on the themes of exile and the relationship between the philosopher and the tyrant, whose figure may have been modelled on Domitian.⁶⁰ Since these were very common philosophical themes, their presence cannot be solely attributed to the philosopher's personal ordeal. Yet Epictetus' work does reveal that the experience of exile, whether through individual banishment or collective expulsion, could boost a philosopher's reputation. Epictetus conceives of his departure from Rome as the exile that offers true freedom to the philosopher. As Anthony Long notes, when Epictetus left Rome his reputation was sufficiently ensured to allow the setting up of a new school, but it was the distance from Rome and the political and economic centrality of Nicopolis that attracted prominent pupils.⁶¹

To some philosophers, exile came as a blessing in disguise. Epictetus records the cheerfulness with which his own teacher, Musonius Rufus, endured exile under Nero and Vespasian: "so I must go into exile: does anyone, then, keep me from going with a smile and cheerful and serene?" (*Discourses* 1.1).⁶² Musonius himself wrote a treatise called "Why Exile is not an Evil," in which he alludes to the fortunes that befell the exiled Cynic Demetrius:

In fact, for some people exile has even been advantageous, all things considered. Exile transformed Diogenes from an ordinary person into a philosopher (ὃς ἐκ μὲν ἰδιώτου φιλόσοφος ἐγένετο φυγών): instead of sitting around in Sinope, he spent his time in Greece, and in his practice of virtue he surpassed the other philosophers. (Musonius Rufus, *Discourses* 10.7-10)⁶³

According to Musonius – who became widely popular himself when exiled to Gyara – Diogenes was transformed from an untrained, unlearned person into a real philosopher. His identity as a philosopher was thus strengthened

60 As argued by Chester G. Starr, "Epictetus and the Tyrant," *Classical Philology* 44 (1949): 20-29.

61 Anthony A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 10-11.

62 According to Dio 65.13.1-2 (epit.), Musonius was exempted from a general expulsion under Vespasian.

63 I have used the recent translation by Cynthia King that was published and prefaced by William B. Irvine: *Musonius Rufus: Lectures and Sayings* (rev. edn.; S.I.: CreateSpace. Independent Publishing Platform, 2011), 45.

by the way in which he was treated and categorized by political power. The philosopher who showed commitment to the philosophical principle of frank speech and so incurred suffering under a despot enhanced his philosophical status.⁶⁴

The relationship between philosophy and political power was a popular theme particularly from the early second century onwards. This accounts for the prominence of the topic of Domitian's expulsion order in Philostratus's biography of Apollonius of Tyana.⁶⁵ Philostratus elaborates on the expulsion as an expression of Domitian's despotism, to which Apollonius, as a true philosopher, was opposed. While other philosophers stopped composing incriminating orations or changed their dress and fled "to the western Celts and the deserts of Libya and Scythia", Apollonius organized the opposition (*Life of Apollonius* 7.4).⁶⁶ Likewise, the philosopher Telesinus risked his life for philosophy when he "gave way quietly before the edict which has lately been issued against philosophers of every kind, because he preferred to be in exile as a philosopher, than to remain in Rome as a consul" (*Life of Apollonius* 7.11). In Philostratus's narrative, Domitian's expulsion order functions as the historical background against which the theme of the true philosopher and the tyrant could be played out. The author of Acts, as is explained below, used an expulsion order in a similar fashion as the historical framework for his narrative about Prisca and Aquila and their travels.

The "Greek origins" of Philosophy

We will conclude this section with some final observations on the possible reasons why philosophers were singled out for expulsion. Although it is often noted that philosophers were repeatedly expelled from the early imperial city, the historical record only points convincingly to the one

64 See also Dio Chrysostom's reflections on his banishment, particularly in his discourse on exile (φυγή). Chrysostom was not banished for being a philosopher, but he certainly bore it as a true Stoic. It was only when he started to roam the Greek world in humble dress (as a Cynic), so he narrates, that "it came about gradually and without any planning or any self-conceit on my part that I acquired this name (of philosopher)" (*On Exile* 11).

65 See Jaap-Jan Flinterman, *Power, Paideia and Pythagoreanism: Greek Identity, Conceptions of the Relationship between Philosophers and Monarchs and Political Ideas in Philostratus' Life of Apollonius* (Dutch monographs on Ancient History and Archaeology 13; Amsterdam: Gieben 1995), 148-157.

66 Compare Philostratus on Apollonius's departure after Nero issued a proclamation that no one should teach philosophy in public at Rome: "Apollonius turned his steps to the Western regions of the earth, which they say are bounded by the Pillars, because he wished to visit and behold the ebb and flow of the ocean, and the city of Gadeira" (*Life of Apollonius* 4.47).

expulsion order under Domitian.⁶⁷ We have seen that this act was specifically connected to legal actions against the group of protagonists fighting for senatorial liberty, who supported their opposition by means of Stoic precepts. Other individual punitive actions against individuals are well attested. Nero had earlier forced several senators to commit suicide and banished Musonius Rufus on the traditional grounds of corrupting Roman youth (Tacitus, *Annals* 17.71). Vespasian also sentenced several Stoic senators and philosophers to death or exile, but mention of a general expulsion is limited to Cassius Dio (67.13.3).⁶⁸

Nevertheless, it can be said that philosophy was increasingly politicised: accusing a political opponent of Stoic sympathies was equivalent to insinuating treason (cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.75).⁶⁹ Therefore, when Domitian responded to political opposition by ordering all *philosophi* to leave the city, he categorized resistance as philosophical and philosophy as resistant. Moreover, by issuing an expulsion edict, the emperor played on traditional Roman uneasiness about philosophy as an external cultural influence that weakened Roman morals. Previous acts against philosophers had been taken during the late Republic in a time of increasing interaction with Hellenic traditions. These acts, including a *senatus consultum* that ordered the praetor to remove rhetoricians and philosophers from the city, were presented as statements against the “corruption” of Roman morals by Greek learning.⁷⁰ Even though the practice of philosophy was demonstrably part of Roman elite culture, its authority could be discredited, when deemed beneficial, by referring to its perceived Greek origins. Michael Trapp observes that philosophy could become “caught up in a more general Roman elite practice, of using reactions to Greek cultural imports as a means of

67 See, for instance, Mark Morford, *The Roman Philosophers: From the Time of Cato the Censor to the Death of Marcus Aurelius* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 183: “Domitian was hostile to philosophers as a group and again expelled them from Italy in 93 C.E., the fourth such expulsion in Roman history”.

68 For confrontations between Vespasian and philosophers, see Barbara Levick, *Vespasian* (Routledge: London, 1999), 79–94.

69 See also Miriam Griffin’s discussion of Seneca’s *Epistle* 73, suggesting that Thræsea’s use of Stoicism gave philosophy the image of a dissenting activity: “Philosophy, Politics, and Politicians at Rome,” 20–21.

70 The *senatus consultum* is rendered by Suetonius, *Rhetoricians*. 1; Gellius, *Attic Nights* 15.11.1. Two Epicureans were banned from Rome in 173 or 153 B.C.E. on the stereotypical grounds of introducing pleasure (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 12.547a); a philosophical embassy was evicted for “corrupting the youth”. On these actions, see Erich S. Gruen, *Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy* (Cincinnati Classical Studies New Series, 7 Leiden: Brill, 1990), 158–192.

debating what it means to be Roman.”⁷¹ The appreciation of philosophy, Trapp notes, could be mitigated through the reflection that it was Greek in origin, and therefore to be practiced with restraint by a good Roman. Despite the integration of philosophy into Roman elite culture, it thus remained possible to identify its origins as Greek and thereby make a statement about what was properly Roman. Moreover, much like astrologers claimed to have knowledge of the future, philosophers professed knowledge of the path to wisdom and virtue that was unattainable for the non-specialist. No doubt the dissenting senators made similar claims. By expelling philosophers from Rome, Domitian confirmed that philosophy was an imported product and rejected it as a source of authority for the Roman elite. Philosophers were expelled not because philosophy was of non-Roman origin, but because its imputed non-Roman origin could be used as grounds for discrediting members of a group that was intensely involved in Roman politics.

6. Astrologers: Politics, Foreignness, and Power

Before returning to the events under Tiberius and moving on to Claudius's expulsion of Jews, there is one final group to consider. Collective expulsion orders were issued at least six times against astrologers. Previous scholarship has largely focused on their involvement in social disorder and political subversion, thus taking the rhetorical language used to support coercive measures at face value.⁷² However, astrologers, like philosophers, did not form a distinct social group. Astrology was a respectable field of learning that was practiced and used across various social circles. Its practitioners were found among the cheap fortune-tellers at the circus and frowned upon by elite Romans as quacks and profiteers, while others served the elite and acted as influential advisors at the imperial court. A general round up of

71 Michael B. Trapp, *Philosophy in the Roman Empire: Ethics, Politics and Society* (Ashgate Ancient Philosophy Series; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 253. The ambiguous position of philosophy in Roman society is illustrated by Johannes Hahn's observation that there were no government-funded teaching positions in philosophy and that philosophers, unlike other professional educators, were not granted relief from taxes and public duties until the time of Vespasian: *Der Philosoph und die Gesellschaft: Selbstverständnis, öffentliches Auftreten und populäre Erwartungen in der hohen Kaiserzeit* (HABES 7; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1989), 101–118.

72 For this reading, see in particular the work of Frederick H. Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics* (Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society 37; Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1954). Ramsey MacMullen includes astrologers among the “enemies of the Roman order” in *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest and Alienation in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966).

“unruly astrologers”, who were not distinguishable by outer appearance, was neither feasible nor the aim of the expulsion orders.

More than any of the other groups that we have discussed, astrologers could certainly get caught up in politically subversive activities. We saw earlier that one of Vitellius’s first acts as emperor was to post an edict that ordered astrologers to leave the city. In the turbulent Year of the Four Emperors, it was imperative to nip rumors about the favorable horoscope of other imperial candidates in the bud.⁷³ But the position of astrology and its professional practitioners in Roman society was highly complex.⁷⁴ Just like actors, astrologers had the potential to stir up crowds with predictions that at times took on a life of their own in popular rumors. The elite disdain for the commercial use of astrological practice cast its practitioners as charlatans who deceived the susceptible masses to make a profit. Another factor that made their position in Roman society both influential and precarious was that they acted as religious specialists whose skilled knowledge was uncontrollable by those in power.⁷⁵ Along these lines, astrology could be included in the category of un-Roman religious practices that corrupted Roman morality. Astrological knowledge was associated with eastern traditions, as indicated by the common designation of astrologers as “Chaldaeans”. This cultural perception of astrology as “foreign” was part of its appeal, and duly exploited by some practitioners, but also meant that it could always be used to demarcate the boundaries of proper Roman religious and moral behavior when deemed necessary.

To understand the background of most of the expulsion orders, we should therefore look beyond social and political unrest to the political use to which astrologers and their knowledge could be put. The claim to know an individual’s course of life and, especially, his or her date of death made astrology an instrument of those who desired power, and it made astrologers themselves politically suspicious. Tiberius’s expulsion of astrologers and magicians in 16 or 17 C.E. was probably related to the legal proceedings against M. Scribonius Libo Drusus, who was accused of consulting astrologers, magicians, and dream interpreters in planning his

73 Tacitus, *Histories* 2.62; Suetonius, *Vitellius* 14.4; Dio 61.1.4. The role of astrologers in encouraging Otho to revolt against Galba is elaborately described by Tacitus, *Histories* 1.22.

74 Since the complex issue cannot be discussed in detail here, I follow the brief discussion by James B. Rives, “Magicians and Astrologers,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, 679–692.

75 In *Die Enteignung der Wahrsager: Studien zum kaiserlichen Wissensmonopol in der Spätantike* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), Marie Theres Fögen argues that the emperors’ increasingly monopolistic claim on knowledge further compromised the position of astrologers.

coup.⁷⁶ Augustus appears to have set the legal precedent for these trials by issuing an edict that prohibited the consulting of astrologers in private or with regard to questions concerning death.⁷⁷ The suggestion of making use of astrological services was enough to throw suspicion onto someone: in 52 C.E., Furius Scribonianus was exiled “on the charge of inquiring into the end of the sovereign by the agency of astrologers” (Tacitus, *Annals* 12.52). Just as Domitian had ordered a general expulsion of philosophers around the trials of the Stoic senators, there was now a “cruel but impotent decree of the senate expelling astrologers from Italy” (*Annals* 12.52). In a number of cases, then, collective expulsion orders of astrologers followed on from treasonous inquiries by members of the ruling elite, or rather from the suspicion and accusation of treason. We could read these edicts as warnings directed at astrologers against assisting in seditious activities. However, as Pauline Ripat has pointed out, our sources usually do not articulate a direct relationship between mass expulsions of astrologers and the treasonous activities of the elite.⁷⁸ The message was more indirect. They communicated to the Roman populace that astrologers practiced a form of divination that was not at home in Rome. Whereas the emperor both controlled and embodied the legitimate sources of knowledge of the cosmos, his opponents were linked with unauthorized, foreign practices.

The foreignness of astrology thus offered potential for its denigration, but it also formed a source of social power for some of its practitioners. The aura of alien wisdom was part of their claim to skills that were inaccessible to others. Some astrologers exploited their un-Roman air by adopting very deliberate Egyptian or other eastern names such as Pammenes or Seleucus, or even a combination, such as Babylonius Horos.⁷⁹ The effects of expulsion orders or other official punishments could enlarge this association with unRoman-ness. Juvenal provides a clear, if satirical, description of these

76 The connection is only implied by Tacitus, *Annales* 2.32; see further Suetonius, *Tiberius* 36.1; Dio 57.15.7-8; Ulpian 15.2.1.

77 Dio 56.25.2-5 is our only source for Augustus's prohibition in 11 C.E. of private consultations of seers, specifically about the imperial house. Dio 49.43.4 also reports that Agrippa banned astrologers as early as 33 B.C.E. to keep Rome quiet while Octavian was struggling with Mark Anthony. A *senatus consultum* recorded by Ulpian 15.2.1 and tentatively dated to 17 C.E. describes exile and property confiscation for *mathematici*, Chaldaeans and the like, or death if the person is a foreigner. The ban was ignored but provided legal grounds for condemnations such as that of Aemilia and Scribonianus (see note 34 above).

78 Ripat, “Expelling Misconceptions,” 118.

79 See also Ripat, “Expelling Misconceptions,” 129-130, referring to parallel cases of *haruspices* who adopted Etruscan names.

impacts. Complaining about the eagerness with which Roman matrons used the services of exotic religious specialists, he states,

they have even greater faith (*fiducia*) in the Chaldaeans. Whatever the astrologer says they'll believe has come from Ammon's fountain, now that the oracles at Delphi are silent and the human race is doomed to darkness about the future. (Juvenal, *Satire* 6.553-556.)

These verses contain a subtle mix of religious techniques. The satirist seems to mock the clients' mistaken attribution of the source of astrological knowledge not to the examination of the stars but to an oracle, the domain of priests and not astrologers. The silence of the Delphic oracle, an image of religious decline, led interest to shift to the eastern oracle of the Egyptian god Ammon at the oasis of Siwa. Juvenal's Chaldaeans, however, do not seem to protest the mistake and parade the foreign source of their knowledge for commercial purposes. But what truly contributed to the reputation of astrologers in the eyes of the female religious shoppers, Juvenal continues, was their subjection to official punishment.

Yet the most important of these is the one that's been exiled most often (*qui saepius exul*). That's the source of their faith in his skill, if his right hand has clanked with iron. There's no talent in any astrologer without a criminal record (*indemnatus*), but only in the one who nearly died, who just managed to get sent to a Cycladic island and finally languished on tiny Seriphus. (Juvenal, *Satire* 6.559-564)

An astrologer who had no criminal record had no talent. The passage suggests that if Roman authorities bothered to banish astrologers, then their skills as astrologers must be authentic. It may also be implied that these astrologers themselves boasted of their hardship and suffering, reminiscent of similar language in Paul's letters and later Christian literature (e.g., 2 Cor. 12.10).⁸⁰ Ripat, offering a similar analysis, has proposed to distinguish a separate category of self-proclaimed "Expellable Astrologers" – entrepreneurs who provoked expulsion decrees to enhance their professional success by purposely transgressing the prohibition on death horoscopes.⁸¹ Yet, since

80 See most fully James A. Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion, and Power: Readiness to Withstand Hardship as a Corroboration of Legitimacy in the New Testament* (WUNT 270; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

81 Ripat, "Expelling Misconceptions," esp. 129.

the expulsion orders were also very much motivated by the interests of the emperor or the senatorial elite, the idea that some astrologers sought their own expulsion may be overstated. Regardless of the astrologer's own role, some no doubt profited from punishment and exclusion. In this respect, their relationship to political power resembles that of the philosophers whose exile for withstanding persecution confirmed their philosophical standing.

7. Tiberian Rhetoric Reconsidered

If we now return to the senatorial decree issued under Tiberius in light of our discussion thus far, we can recognize something of the moralizing rhetoric that warns of foreign influences that threaten to corrupt Roman values. We have seen that the reports share a concern with the spread of foreign and, more explicitly, Jewish ways: Josephus builds a narrative around the Isis-adept Paulina, “very much given to the worship of Isis” (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.70), and Fulvia who had “gone over to the Jewish ordinances” (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.82). The fragments of Dio’s *Roman History* accuse Jews of actively drawing people in (57.18.5), while Suetonius reports the expulsion of “those of the same people or of similar affiliations” (*similia sectantes*; *Tiberius* 36.1). This could allude to people who were involved in the Jewish cult though not of the Jewish *gens*, although it is also possible that he simply means people suspected of similar superstitions. Finally, Tacitus writes of people “infected with that superstition” (*ea superstitione infecta*; *Annals* 2.85). These words are usually taken at face value as a reference to converts to Judaism, as if the metaphor of “infection” or “contamination” can only be used for a disease incurred at a later age.

This language expressing the religiously corrupting or polluting effect of Jewish ways does not necessarily reflect the direct occasion for taking action. It should rather be understood as its rhetorically charged justification, similar to that surrounding the expulsions of actors, astrologers, and philosophers as foreign imports. The link with “disease” could even be present in ironical fashion in the Jews’ conscription to Sardinia: “if they died owing to the oppressiveness of the climate, it was a cheap loss” (*si ob gravitatem caeli interissent, vile damnum*), as Tacitus renders the text of the *senatus consultum* (*Annals* 2.85).⁸² The accusation that foreigners

82 The link between the unhealthy climate of Sardinia and *superstitione infecta* was made by one of the participants in the SBL Hellenistic Judaism Section, San Francisco 2011.

are spreading their ways seems to be a stock element in Roman and non-Roman discourses that call for a more exclusive understanding of what it is to be native. It is crucial that “foreign” is a flexible label that can be underemphasized as well as overemphasized or paraded.⁸³ The discursive categorization or “framing” of people, practices, or knowledge as “foreign” to reassert a sense of cohesion and mark boundaries along religious and moral lines is well-documented for ancient Rome, as for other communities through time and space. Language of (im)purity and disease is prominent in these contexts, as it is in modern immigration rhetoric, often attributing moral decline to outside influences.⁸⁴ As Mary Douglas has pointed out, labelling things “pure” or “polluted” serves to establish identity and maintain the group that has the power to include or exclude, and so reinforces the group’s moral code.⁸⁵ The categorization of the influence or presence of certain groups as a contamination of Roman morals gives expression to the sense of transgression that is associated with “mixing”. Rome did pride itself on its openness, but these open modes of self-perception and presentation co-existed with a restrictive discourse that warned against foreign corruptions of Roman morality.⁸⁶ The occasional expulsion of foreign elements appears to have been one of the ways in which this restrictive discourse was put into practice.⁸⁷

The timing of these events, as suggested above, may have arisen from internal political concerns over Germanicus’s activities in the East – whether that meant his suspicious death by poison, as Gruen suggested, or his imputed un-Roman and potentially treasonous behavior in Egypt. If

83 As emphasized throughout Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: Volume I – A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

84 For “contamination” in immigration rhetoric, see Josue D. Cisneros, “Contaminated Communities: The Metaphor of ‘Immigrant as Pollutant’ in Media Representations of Immigration,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 11 (2008): 569–602.

85 Mary T. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Paul Keegan, 1966); on pollution in the classical world, Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983). For pollution as a wide-ranging discourse in Roman religion, morality, and politics, see now Jack Lennon, “Pollution, Religion and Society in the Roman World,” in *Rome, Pollution and Propriety: Dirt, Disease and Hygiene in the Eternal City from Antiquity to Modernity* (ed. Mark Bradley; British School at Rome Studies; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 43–58.

86 See, for instance, Suetonius’s explanation of Augustus’s restrictions on citizenship as based on his concern “to keep the people pure and unsullied by any mixing in of foreign and servile blood” (*Augustus* 40.3) with comments by Dench, *Romulus’ Asylum*, 453.

87 For “discourse” as language and practice, see (amongst other works) Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (ed. and transl. C. Gordon; New York, NY: Pantheon, 1980).

Germanicus's threat to political stability came from the East, action against "foreign ceremonies," particularly Eastern cults, was warranted. This is not to exclude any real presence of social concern regarding the adoption of Jewish or Egyptian customs or rituals among Rome's population. We may compare the authorities' strong response to other political provocations of "moral panics" over a feared threat to social order and declining morality.⁸⁸ A specific group is designated as the cause of decline, often foreigners or other marginal groups, whose supposed threat is imagined or exaggerated, and the actions taken therefore disproportionate. Fears about social change, instability, or the influence of foreign traditions are rhetorically magnified by politicians' calls to close the border, literally or symbolically.

Valerius Maximus: Jews Spreading their Ways in 139 B.C.E. or 19 C.E.

The accusation that foreigners are spreading their ways is also present in the sources for the only expulsion of Jews (and astrologers) that we have not discussed thus far, since the event supposedly occurred in 139 B.C.E. This expulsion is reported only by the Roman moralist Valerius Maximus in his *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* which he published in 31 C.E. and dedicated to Tiberius. It is a collection of anecdotes that illustrates ancient Roman commitment to the ancestral ways. By opening this work with a book on religion, as Hans-Friedrich Mueller observes, Valerius praised the practice of traditional religion as a central virtue in Tiberian Rome.⁸⁹ The section "On Superstitions" contains several examples of senatorial acts against foreign superstitions, including the edict dated to 139 B.C.E. that ordered the expulsion of Jews and Chaldaeans (*Memorable Deeds* 1.3.3). If the text indeed reflects a late Republican event, it would also be the earliest reference to the presence of Jews in the city. Scholars have guessed at the possible reasons for the expulsion: could there be a connection with the arrival of the Maccabaeen embassy of 142 B.C.E.? Were Jews punished for

88 The classic study is Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panic: The Creation of Mods and Rockers* (Sociology and the Modern World; London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1972); see also Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (2nd ed.; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). Ripat refers to "moral panics" in her discussion of astrology: "Expelling Misconceptions", 146–149. On "moral panics" and official framing in the Bacchanalia affair, see Ineke Sluiter, *Maken en breken: Over taal, identiteit en minderheden* (Leiden: Universiteit Leiden, 2005). On the political use of frames to diagnose problems and rally support by constructing new meanings, see Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 611–639.

89 See Hans-Friedrich Mueller, *Roman Religion in Valerius Maximus* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 11–20.

bringing in a new cult without official permission, or should we rather think of a more general statement against un-Roman religious practices in a period of increased cultural contact with the East?⁹⁰ The act does not seem completely out of place in the mid-second century B.C.E., which saw several measures that restricted “foreign” religious and intellectual influences that supposedly threatened to corrupt Roman values.⁹¹

However, the transmission history of Valerius’s text poses some difficulties. Valerius used Livy as a source, but this part of Livy’s history (Book 54) only survives in a summary found at Oxyrhynchus (P. Oxy 668). This papyrus fragment indeed mentions an expulsion of astrologers but not of Jews. It is therefore not unthinkable that Valerius, who wrote under Tiberius, had been inspired by the events of his own time to include Jews in the event.⁹² A second textual problem is that Valerius’s own account has only survived in the abridged versions of the two epitomizers Julius Paris (ca. 400 C.E.) and Nepotianus (ca. 500 C.E.). Mary C. J. Miller has suggested that the way in which these acts are described was influenced by the experiences of its Byzantine composers and does not reflect circumstances in Rome either in 139 B.C.E. or under Tiberius.⁹³ However, while the specific wording comes from the hands of the epitomizers, the points on which they agree may be attributed to Valerius.

Both versions attest to the recurring topic of Jews and astrologers spreading their foreign traditions. According to Julius Paris, the *praetor peregrinus* issued an edict (*edicto*) that ordered Chaldaeans to leave Rome and Italy within ten days, to put a stop to their profitable business of false predictions that unsettled the gullible Roman populace. Nepotianus confirms that they were thought to misuse divination for financial gain by offering “foreign wisdom” (*peregrinam scientiam*) for sale. The Jews, in the version by Julius Paris, had to return to their homes because they “tried to infect Roman customs (*Romanos inficere mores*) by the worship of Jupiter Sabazius”. Nepotianus records that the praetor “removed from Rome the Jews, who endeavored to pass on their own rites to the Romans (*Romanis tradere sacra*

90 Respectively, Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule*, 129–131; Schäfer, *Judeophobia*, 148–151; Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 82; Gruen, *Diaspora*, 18–19.

91 See Gruen, *Greek Culture and Roman Policy*; Orlin, *Foreign Cults*, 162–190.

92 For this argument, see Salvatore Alessandri, “La presunta cacciata dei Giudei da Roma nel 139 a.C.,” *Studi Classici e Orientali* 17 (1968): 187–198.

93 “Julius Paris included the Jews in the events of that year in order to justify current Roman policy against this group”. Mary C. J. Miller, “Julius Paris on the Expulsion of the Jews from Rome in 139 BC,” *The Ancient World* 40 (2009): 186–199 (citation on p. 198).

sua conati erant), and removed their private altars from public places”.⁹⁴ In both cases, the reason given for the expulsion is related to the presumed effect of these groups on Romans: Chaldaeans profited from the foreign wisdom which they imparted to Roman minds, while Jews were said to spread their ways, which is described as an “infection” of Roman morals.

Josephus’s Roman Response to a Roman “Frame”

Finally, what can we say about the effects of the senatorial decree of 19 C.E.? Even if expulsion orders were not enforced, declaring a group unwanted, emphasizing their foreignness and their corrupting effect on Roman morals would have had an impact on the way in which these people were regarded and treated in Rome and how they saw themselves in relation to official power. Even a symbolic statement needs to have some kind of effect to make it work. Identity discourses, the way in which people talk about themselves in relation to others, are affected by power and politics.⁹⁵ In the cases of the philosophers and the astrologers, we saw that official punishment could support the veracity of their professional identities. Did Jews also derive identity from expulsion orders? It is possible that their mention in official decrees somehow recast the Jewish sense of belonging within Roman society in their own eyes and those of others.⁹⁶ However, their interests in advertising this status would be radically different in a situation where there was no professional gain.⁹⁷ It is worthwhile, however, to read Josephus’s version of the events from the perspective of the effects of expulsion orders as ideational assertions of power.

Josephus’s novelistic account, as described above, revolves around the comparison of Tiberius’s response to scandals involving the Jewish cult and that of Isis. Concerning the latter, Tiberius punished the guilty after a thorough investigation, while in the former he expelled all of the Jews

94 Valerius or Paris perhaps confused Sabazius with “Sabaoth” or “Sabbath”: Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, 2:358; on the private altars, see Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 83.

95 On the effects of categorizations by governmental authority, see especially Robert Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations* (London: Sage, 1997).

96 For different views on how the imposition of the *fiscus Judaicus* affected outsider and insider definitions of Jewishness, see Marius Heemstra, *The Fiscus Judaicus and the Parting of the Ways* (WUNT II 277; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); Martin D. Goodman, “The Fiscus Judaicus and Gentile Attitudes to Judaism in Flavian Rome,” in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (eds. Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James B. Rives; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 167-177; idem, “Nerva, the Fiscus Judaicus and Jewish Identity,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 79 (1989): 40-44.

97 Compare Ripat, “Expelling Misconceptions,” 149 on this point.

for the very different crimes of a few. Josephus diverts attention from the “terrible thing” that happened to the Jews (passive) with his ornate account of “shameful practices” (πράξεις αἰσχυνῶν) in the temple of Isis, which were caused by the “most shameless act of the Isiacs” (τοῦ τῶν Ἰσιακῶν τολμήματος; *Jewish Antiquities* 18.65). However, Josephus does much more than simply point out Tiberius’s unequal treatment and the innocence of the greater Jewish community. I have already referred to Shelley Matthews’ observations on Josephus’s use of novelistic themes and Roman moralizing tropes.⁹⁸ Josephus’s comparison of the scandals is very explicit (Fulvia and Paulina are both married to a Saturninus!), and in doing so, he emphasizes the differences between the two cults. Both parts of his story show the Roman *topos* of honorable matrons who are attracted to Eastern cults. Josephus admits, as it were, that fraudulent religious specialists could be found among Jews as well, claiming expertise in the Jewish law (προσποιεῖτο μὲν ἐξηγεῖσθαι σοφίαν νόμων τῶν Μωυσέως; *Jewish Antiquities* 18.81). But he distances this criminal Jew from the wider Jewish community by adding that he had been banished from his own country for transgressing the laws (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.81). Only Paulina’s fate affirms the stereotypical Roman concern over foreign cults as sites of transgressive sexuality. Josephus’s story about the Isis cult, as Matthews points out, addresses much more fundamental Roman concerns about the chastity of Roman wives. Given the frequent association of adultery with a threat both to the stability of the household and to the state, the political ramifications of the Isis scandal are much greater than the financial fraud of some criminal Jews.⁹⁹ Josephus thus confirms Roman concerns about the consequences of female interest in these cults but puts much more emphasis on the harmful effects of devotion to Isis.

Josephus’s careful effort in shaping the contrasting episodes suggests that we can read his account as a narrative response to the expulsion order in which he resists the conflation of Jewish and Egyptian rites that was implied by the *senatus consultum*.¹⁰⁰ The association of Jews with Egyptians was, after all, a highly sensitive issue. Roman authors picked up ethnographic traditions concerning the Egyptian origins of the Jewish people and recycled

98 Matthews, *First Converts*, 10–28.

99 *Ibid.*, 21–23.

100 Horst R. Moehring emphasized Josephus’s moralizing tone and noted that it is “exactly this inability, or unwillingness of the Roman authorities to differentiate between ‘the other’ Oriental cults and Judaism which forces Josephus to introduce and emphasize the distinction in his own narrative”: “The Persecution of the Jews and the Adherents of the Isis Cult at Rome A.D. 19,” *Novum Testamentum* 3 (1959): 303.

Egyptian and Hellenistic stories about the Exodus.¹⁰¹ Some used the tradition that Jews were expelled from Egypt as lepers to explain the specific Jewish customs of circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath observance.¹⁰² The legal differences between Jews and Egyptians were of direct political and financial relevance in the Alexandrian conflicts, fought out before Gaius and Claudius. For both reasons, Josephus shows himself very much concerned to distance Jews from Egyptians in his *Against Apion*, and, as in the Fulvia story, he exploits Roman stereotypes about Egyptian religion as a foil for a favorable presentation of Jews.¹⁰³

However, Josephus was not only creatively rewriting the events of a few decades earlier. Matthews has pointed out that the context in which Josephus was writing in Domitianic Rome is at least equally important for the way in which he reported this episode. By the time Josephus wrote this part of the *Antiquities*, the Isis cult had gained imperial patronage.¹⁰⁴ The Flavian appropriation of Isis and Serapis was one of the ways in which they legitimized their new dynasty. Their other dynastic foundation remained the military successes achieved in suppressing the Jewish revolt, which they emphasized with anti-Judean propaganda that appears to have continued under Domitian.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, there are indications that the triumph over the Jews was presented as a victory of Isis. Josephus himself reports that Vespasian and Titus spent the night before the triumph that celebrated

101 See John M. G. Barclay, "Hostility to Jews as Cultural Construct: Egyptian, Hellenistic, and Early Christian Paradigms," in idem, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (WUNT 275; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 157-180; repr. from *Josephus und das Neue Testament: Wechselseitige Wahrnehmungen. II. Internationales Symposium zum Corpus Judaeo-Hellenisticum*, 25.-28. Mai 2006, Greifswald (eds. Christfried Böttrich and Jens Herzer; WUNT 209; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Hellenistic Culture and Society 30; Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 41-72.

102 See particularly Pompeius Trogus apud Justinus, *Epitome* 36.2.14-15; Tacitus, *Histories* 5.3-4. These ethnographic traditions are discussed by Rene S. Bloch, *Antike Vorstellungen vom Judentum: Der Judenexkurs des Tacitus im Rahmen der griechisch-römischen Ethnographie* (Historia 160; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002).

103 See especially Katell Berthelot, "The Use of Greek and Roman Stereotypes of the Egyptians by Hellenistic Jewish Apologists, with Special Reference to Josephus' *Against Apion*," and John M. G. Barclay, "Judaism in Roman Dress: Josephus' Tactics in the *Contra Apionem*," in *Internationales Josephus-Kolloquium Aarhus 1999* (eds. Jürgen U. Kalms and Folker Siegert; Münster: LIT, 2000), respectively 185-221 and 231-245.

104 Matthews, *First Converts*, 16-19. She argues that Josephus's narrative is motivated by Flavian patronage of the Isis cult, but sees a more widespread anti-Jewish sentiment and concern about Jewish mission at the turn of the first century.

105 See several contributions in Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives eds., *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

their victory over the Jews in or near the sanctuary of Isis (*The Jewish War* 7.123). Two “Iudea Capta” coins depict the Iseum on the Campus Martius on the reverse. Its courtyard featured an arch that was probably built in celebration of the Flavian triumph.¹⁰⁶ After a fire in 80 C.E., Domitian rebuilt and embellished the Iseum Campense with rich Egyptianising decoration.¹⁰⁷ It is difficult to escape the impression that these events were in Josephus’s mind when he wrote that Tiberius demolished the temple of Isis and ordered that her statue be thrown into the river Tiber (τόν τε ναὸν καθεῖλεν καὶ τὸ ἄγαλμα τῆς Ἰσιδος εἰς τὸν Θύβριν ποταμὸν ἐκέλευσεν; 18.80).¹⁰⁸ Having Tiberius destroy a temple that Domitian had just reconstructed can be read between the lines as subtle criticism.¹⁰⁹

8. Claudius’s Expulsion of Jews in Context

What then, finally, do we make of the expulsion that figures most prominently in New Testament scholarship? The evidence for Claudius’s action against Roman Jews in the second half of the 40s is scarcer than for the events of 19 C.E., and of a different character. Suetonius famously records that Claudius expelled Jews from the city because they were causing unrest “at the instigation of Chrestus” (*Iudeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit*; *Claudius* 25.4). The *Acts of the Apostles* confirms that the emperor “expelled all Jews from the city,” which resulted in the departure of Prisca and Aquila to Corinth, where they met Paul (Acts 18:2). The identity of “Chrestus,” on which most scholarly discussion has focused, is not immediately relevant for the purpose of this article.¹¹⁰ Claudius’s

106 For references, see Matthews, *First Converts*, 113 notes 25–27.

107 Miguel John Versluys, “The Sanctuary of Isis on the Campus Martius in Rome,” *Babesch* 72 (1997): 159–169.

108 Private shrines of Isis were destroyed during the late Republic; see Eric M. Orlin, “Octavian and Egyptian Cults: Redrawing the Boundaries of Romanness,” *American Journal of Philology* 129 (2008): 231–253. Throwing a statue into the river was not a common way to end cultic activity. We may read it as a sarcastic reference to the myth of Isis’s recapture of Osiris’s body from the Nile or to the cultic bathing of the Isis statue in Nilotic water, now replaced by water from the river that symbolized Rome.

109 On reading Josephus between the lines, see Steve Mason, “Flavius Josephus in Flavian Rome: Reading On and Between the Lines,” in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (eds. Anthony J. Boyle and William J. Dominik; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 559–589; John M. G. Barclay, “The Empire Writes Back: Josephan Rhetoric in Flavian Rome,” in *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews*, 301–316; repr. from *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

110 The literature and variant interpretations are too vast to sum up. See the extensive discussions in Howard D. Slingerland, *Claudian Policymaking and the Early Imperial Repression of*

expulsion order responded to *tumultus* among the Jewish population – a word with political overtones – regardless of whether this was triggered by the message of Christ and its proclamation among non-Jews.

The evidence of *Acts* suggests that some Jews indeed left the city and, when combined with Paul's greetings to Prisca and Aquila in his letter to Rome of ca. 56-57 C.E., returned after a certain period (Rom. 16:3). If the two sources are independent, the couple can be placed alongside some of the philosophers that we have seen leaving and returning to Rome in the wake of an expulsion order.¹¹¹ It is, however, relevant to consider the literary context in which the author of *Acts* mentions the expulsion. It is used to introduce Prisca and Aquila to the scene, while providing a realistic contemporary setting for their activities and travels by referring to the broader Roman context. There are some other examples of the author's use of this literary technique. A similar role is fulfilled by Augustus's empire-wide census, which forms the background for Mary's and Joseph's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where Jesus is to be born (Luke 2:1-2).¹¹² The way in which the author of Luke-Acts relocates the timing of Quirinius's census (6 C.E.) to make it coincide with the birth of Jesus also challenges the standard dating of Claudius's expulsion to the year 49 C.E. This precise date depends on the fifth-century *Seven Books of History against the Pagans* by Paulus Orosius, who situates the expulsion in Claudius's ninth year but then also incorrectly attributes this information to Josephus (7.6.15-16). The relative chronology of *Acts* can be used in support of his dating, but this solution falls apart if the author applies the same chronological flexibility to Claudius's expulsion as to Augustus's census for literary purposes.¹¹³

Our discussion of the evidence for other expulsion orders has made it clear that it is unlikely that Claudius's expulsion resulted in the departure

Judaism at Rome (South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 160; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997); Helga Botermann, *Das Judenedikt des Kaisers Claudius: Römischer Staat und Christiani im 1. Jahrhundert* (Hermes 71; Franz Steiner Verlag: Stuttgart, 1996).

111 William Walker uses NT references to Aquila and Prisca to support the dependency of Luke-Acts on Paul, but posits the unconvincing argument that Luke-Acts presupposed that Paul's letter to Rome was written before his first letter to Corinth and then needed the expulsion to explain their movement from Rome to Corinth: "The Portrayal of Aquila and Priscilla in Acts: The Question of Sources," *New Testament Studies* 54 (2008): 479-495.

112 See also Luke 3:1-2 and Acts 11:29. For the literary technique, see Loveday C. A. Alexander, *Acts in its Literary Context: A Classicist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles* (Library of New Testament Studies 289; London and New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2007), 133-164.

113 The Gallio inscription (IG 7.1676) offers an absolute reference point to Acts' relative chronology, but only on the assumption that Paul indeed appeared before Gallio and then left for Corinth, where he met Prisca and Aquila (Acts 18:11-17).

of all Jews from Rome. This has implications for the way in which the order has been used by many scholars as a historical backdrop for Paul's letter to Rome, contributing to tensions between Paul's Jewish and gentile addressees. We cannot assume large fluctuations in the composition of the community due to the departure and return of many Jewish believers or of all who observed a Jewish way of life.¹¹⁴ Yet, we also suggested that some groups did partly derive their identity from being included in expulsion orders or other forms of official punishment. Its effects may have been more intangible and indirect.

We have also seen that an expulsion order was not a self-evident or common measure used to curb unruly groups. Some scholars have understood Claudius's action as sign of an "anti-Jewish policy", following on his earlier ban on Jewish meetings in 41 C.E., which is reported by Cassius Dio: "he did not drive them out, but ordered them, while using their ancestral life (τῷ δὲ δὴ πατρίῳ βίῳ χρωμένους), not to assemble" (60.6.6).¹¹⁵ This was the first year of Claudius's rule, and Dio also reports that he banned associations that had been established under Caligula, a restrictive measure that served to emphasize the new emperor's control of public order and to distinguish him from his predecessor. It seems that Dio's separate mention of Jews here does not arise from any specifically anti-Jewish measure by Claudius but rather suggests that Jews had petitioned the emperor for exemption from this general ban on assemblies and asked permission to observe their ancestral customs.¹¹⁶

To understand why Claudius issued an expulsion order when there was unrest among the Jewish population a few years later, attention should be directed to other events that occupied the emperor during the second half of the 40s. In 47 C.E., Claudius celebrated the Centennial Games to mark Rome's eight-hundredth anniversary. In his recent biography of Claudius, Josiah Osgood suggests that these festivities helped to promote a number

114 Recent examples include Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2008); Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007); James C. Walters, *Ethnic Issues in Paul's Letter to the Romans: Changing Self-Definitions in Earliest Roman Christianity* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1993).

115 For an "anti-Jewish policy" see Slingerland, *Claudian Policymaking*, 129, 136. Others believe that Cassius Dio presents a different version of the same event, see e.g. Rugers, "Roman Policy," 105-109.

116 This practice is attested by the official documents collected (and embellished) by Josephus in which "ancestral laws" of Jewish communities are officially recognized: see discussion in Miriam Pucci ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights in the Roman World: The Greek and Roman Documents Quoted by Josephus Flavius* (TSAJ 74; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998).

of legislative reforms and strengthen communal morals. In the same year, Claudius revived the censorship – for the first time since 22 B.C.E. – and assumed the office of censor together with Vitellius.¹¹⁷ The office carried great symbolic value: the censor was not only responsible for carrying out the census of Roman citizens throughout the Empire but was also in charge of improving the moral health of the city. Censors might purge the citizen body of disreputable elements, revive lapsed ceremonies, or issue edicts to limit licentious behavior.¹¹⁸

Osgood argues that the censorship was an important part of Claudius's interpretation of his imperial office. Several activities undertaken by Claudius during and after the censorial year of 47-48 C.E. can be understood in this light. By means of "austere edicts", Claudius rebuked the people of Rome for the licence shown in theatres and the abuse of figures of high standing (Tacitus, *Annals* 11.13). In 47 C.E., he reinstalled the college of the Etruscan *haruspices* due to a concern that the "ancient art" had suffered from public neglect and "the popularity of foreign superstitions" (*quia externae superstitiones valescant*; *Annals* 11.15).¹¹⁹ The census of 47-48 C.E. ended with the ancient purification ceremony of the lustration around the sacred boundary of the city, the *pomerium*. In 49 C.E., Claudius extended this boundary to include the Aventine hill, marking his enlargement of Rome's territory with his conquests in Britain. Osgood sees Claudius's extension of the *pomerium* in connection with the census as "echoing a theme of his censorship, the increase of the Roman people." The census celebrated Rome's growth, "and it also drew attention to the value Claudius placed on citizenship and status", as shown by his grants of citizenship to those who had served Rome.¹²⁰ Most controversial was the emperor's decision to admit to the senate several prominent men from Gallia Comata, the "trousered Gauls" whose last revolt dated back only to 21 C.E, leaving senators lamenting the days when the senate was still "Roman-born" (Tacitus, *Annals* 11.23). After Claudius's death, Seneca mocked him for wishing to see all Greeks, Spaniards, and Britons in togas (*Pumpkinification of the Divine Claudius* 3.2).

117 Josiah Osgood, *Claudius Caesar: Image and Power in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 154.

118 For a detailed discussion of Claudius's censorship, see Osgood, *Claudius Caesar*, 154-167.

119 Several other traditionalist measures are mentioned by Gruen, *Diaspora*, 39-41, as the context within which the expulsion of Jews can be understood: "Claudius may well have coupled his ostentatious resurrection of national rituals with action against an alien cult, especially if an excuse was found or invented that indicated some disturbance".

120 Osgood, *Claudius Caesar*, 159-161.

Amidst these debates, Claudius took measures that imposed clearer definitions on citizenship in terms of morals, religion, appearance, and language. Non-citizens were forbidden to wear the toga, while a Greek juror was deprived of citizenship for not knowing Latin.¹²¹ In his office as censor, Claudius defined the limits of the body politic between Roman and non-Roman.¹²² In the light of Claudius's censorial self-understanding as protector of the city's moral health, his response to unrest created by a foreign group by means of an expulsion order can be seen to fit with his wider political concerns.

9. Conclusions

We have set Tiberius's and Claudius's expulsion orders against the Jewish population of Rome in the context of similar acts against actors, philosophers, and astrologers. Regardless of the "integration" of individual members of these groups in Roman society, the activities in which they were engaged could be portrayed as "foreign" when deemed opportune. Expulsion orders labelled these categories as un-Roman and so excluded them from an imagined Roman moral community. Whether they were issued in connection with unrest in the theatre, political opposition in philosophical shape, or suspected treason with astrological support, expulsion orders marked the boundaries of proper Roman behavior. This exclusion was not primarily physical: I have suggested that expulsion orders may be compared to other public proclamations that served to call the people to order or propagate a message of moral reform. Building on Erich Gruen's emphasis on the symbolic character of these acts, this analysis accords with recent approaches to Roman politics that incorporate the symbolic dimensions of Roman political culture and communication in confirming social hierarchies and exercising social control.¹²³

Awareness of the rhetorical character of this moralizing discourse offers a correction to current explanations of expulsions that understand them as responses to an increasing influence of foreign, and particularly

121 For references, see Dench, *Romulus' Asylum*, 278.

122 As noted by Barbara Levick, *Claudius* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 120.

123 E.g., Björn C. Ewald, Carlos F. Noreña, eds., *The Emperor and Rome: Space, Representation, and Ritual*. (Yale Classical Studies; Cambridge and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Most studies are informed by Bourdieu's work on symbolic power, collected in English in *Language and Symbolic Power* (ed. J. B. Thompson; Cambridge: Polity, 1991).

Jewish, practices. From this perspective, statements about the corruptive or polluting effect of Jewish ways on Roman morals should not be seen as the immediate reason for intervening but rather as the language in which these exclusionary discourses tend to be cast. Yet, designating this language as rhetorical by no means diminishes its importance. Rather than “mere rhetoric”, it was a fundamental part of the ideational assertion of power politics.¹²⁴

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124 For the relationship between rhetoric and social reality in accusations of immorality, see Edwards, *Politics of Immorality*, 9-12; Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 228 address the issue of actual practice versus fear of the practice: “a prohibition on a particular activity often ensures that it is defined and perceived as illicit or improper; regulations may, in other words, be responsible for evaluation, as much as they are a consequence of it”.

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Μεμoria Iudati patiri

Some Notes to the Study of the Beginnings of Jewish Presence in Roman Pannonia

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1. Introduction

In the *Letter to the Romans*, the apostle Paul writes “so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ” (Rom. 15:19 NRSV). This fragment of a passage, picked out of its context, is just one example of the fact that even the first Christians counted the territory of Illyricum (Pannonia and Dalmatia) as a place where they could possibly win new people over to their religion. Paul and the first apostles used to go to places where they were listened to with an open heart, and these places – as we can read in the New Testament – were mostly synagogues. This supports the assumption that some Jews lived in Illyricum. Moreover, later tradition holds Andronicus, a follower of Paul, to be the first bishop of Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia), the most important town of Pannonia. Although both this tradition and the possibility of Paul’s journey to Pannonia are not very well-founded historically, we can count on the possibility of an existing Jewish population in the province. Jerome, who was born on the border of Pannonia and Dalmatia (Stridon) and who for this reason knew the region well, wrote in his commentaries on Amos that “they (the Jews) are moved ‘from sea to sea,’ from the British Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean, that is from the west to the south and from ‘the north to the east,’ foreigners in all the world, they do not have the power to find the word of God.”¹

According to a generally accepted theory,² which is also supported by most of the available archaeological and epigraphical sources, the first Jewish settlers appeared in Pannonia at the end of the second century or in the third century C.E. As we will see below, most of the epigraphical evidence shows that Greek-speaking Semitic people, with Jews among them, arrived in Pannonia during the reign of the Severus dynasty (193-235 C.E.), after the

¹ Jerome, *Commentaries on Amos* 3.8.12 (406) in PL (25): 1083.

² E.g., Alexander Scheiber, *Jewish Inscriptions in Hungary from the 3. Century to 1686* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 14.

Marcomannic wars (166-180). Only one inscription, a building inscription from Mursa, shows the existence of a *proseucha*, a place of prayer, earlier than before the end of the second century. Based on this and the presence of Jewish coins in the province, some scholars suppose an earlier presence of Jews there.³ In this essay, I look at the evidence for Jewish presence in the Roman province of Pannonia. I first analyze inscriptions that have been identified as Jewish. Then I briefly discuss other material evidence. Finally, I introduce a recently found inscription that offers new and startling support for the theory that Jews were present in the region earlier than is assumed.

2. Roman Imperial Politics in Pannonia

After the Marcomannic wars, Pannonia was in a special situation. On the one hand, given its four legions and its location as the closest military province to Italy, it played a very important role in the governance of the empire. On the other hand, the havoc of the war between 167 and 180 had serious consequences for the population of the province. The role of Pannonia became even more important when, after the death of Commodus in April 193 C.E., Septimius Severus, the governor of Pannonia Superior, was acclaimed emperor in Carnuntum, Pannonia. His legions significantly helped in the consolidation of his power; he won the civilian wars between 193 and 197 mainly with his Pannonian legions. He even dissolved the Praetorian Guard and replaced it with Danubian soldiers.

Septimius Severus favored the province and, as a sign of it, he gave the region a wide range of privileges and carried out restorations all over it. He re-established or founded towns; he had Aquincum and Carnuntum elevated to the rank of a *colonia*; and Brigetio became a *municipium*. This also encouraged people to come and settle in the Danubian region, even from far-away regions. The quickening pace of commerce and the favorable economic climate of the Severan era attracted many merchants from the East, too. In addition to these tradesmen, several Oriental people arrived in the province after the revolts of the late first and the second century in the Eastern provinces. Many of them belonged to the army; others were slaves or

3 E.g., Ludwig Berger in his *Der Menora-Ring von Kaiseraugst: Jüdische Zeugnisse römischer Zeit zwischen Britannien und Pannonien* (Augst: Römerstadt August Raurica, 2005). This volume is a catalogue of Jewish finds from Britannia to Pannonia. Berger's main argument for dating is based on the presence of Judaeae coins in the province (from the First Jewish War and from the Bar Kochba Revolt), but this is highly debated. On the role of Jewish coins in dating, see Matthias Pfisterer, "Ethnic Identity, Coin Circulation, and Selective Interest," *JA* 1 (2010): 200-206.

later on freed slaves. Among these people from the East were also Jews. We know for sure that Pannonian legions took part in several campaigns against the Parthians and the Jews, both in the Jewish War and the Bar Kochba revolt.⁴

One more factor regarding Roman imperial politics in the second century C.E. needs to be mentioned here: the role of Oriental elements in the imperial family of Septimius Severus.⁵ The examination of the relationship of the Severans and Semitic people can also help us better understand the socio-religious context of Pannonia in the early Principate. From the second half of the first century C.E., the high priest of Emesa in Syria officially only had religious power, but as can also be seen from his family's social relations (e.g., intermarriages), he was a wealthy and powerful man. Julia Domna, the younger daughter of Julius Bassianus, the high priest of the Temple of the Sun, married Lucius Septimius Severus who, in the course of events, was destined to become the Roman emperor. Septimius Severus took her as a second wife seven years after they first met in Syria. In marrying the daughter of the high priest of Elagabal, he defied the prejudice still attached in conservative Roman circles against Roman officers with Oriental wives, and in later years, the admixture of Syrian blood inflicted opportunities for gibes on all who opposed the dynasty. As an official spending a significant amount of time in the Near East, Septimius Severus took part in several cults and religions which clearly affected his mentality and relation to the imperial cult. The role of Oriental elements in the imperial family of Septimius Severus, his legendarily clever Syrian wife and his experience of Eastern cults and the military power of Pannonia helped to create a milieu where also Jews could be part of the empire and settle down.

3. Jewish Inscriptions in Pannonia

In a chapter in his book about the so-called Menorah ring from Kaiseraugust,⁶ Ludwig Berger attempts to collect every Jewish-related material "between Britain and Pannonia". In this essay, my aim is not a re-collection like this which inevitably includes many presuppositions and uncertain associations, but I hope to give a synthesis of the most important facts and proofs

4 See for example E. Ritterling, "Legio," *PW* XII:1750-1751 (XV Apollinaris), 1396-1397 (I Adiutrix), 1449 (II Adiutrix), 1685-1686 (X Gemina), 1741 (XIII Gemina).

5 On Septimius Severus and his family, see Anthony R. Birley, *Septimius Severus: The African Emperor* (London: Routledge, 1999).

6 See note 3. The geographical frames of the volume are rather artificial, as direct connections between these provinces are not proven.

about the history and rule of Jewish people in Pannonia, a border province of the Roman Empire. In addition to materials that have been previously known, most of which are also discussed by Berger, I also introduce some new finds. Based on these, I examine how these data can modify earlier reconstructions of the beginnings of Jewish presence in the province.

The literary sources are silent about why and when Jews settled in Pannonia. They only speak about a large-scale migration of people from the East in general, mentioning Syrians as the most dominant nation. Thus, the most important sources for studying the history of Jewish people in the Danubian provinces are inscriptions. The basic elements and criteria of identifying an inscription as Jewish are the following:⁷

1. presence of Jewish symbols (menorah, lulav, ethrog, shofar);
2. self-identification, e.g., with the term *Iudaeus/a* or their Greek equivalent;
3. Hebrew/Jewish names;
4. elements of Jewish religious practice;
5. the inscription comes from a Jewish cemetery or catacomb;
6. mention of a synagogue (συναγωγή, προσευχή) or a synagogue function;
7. presence of certain formulae, e.g., ἐνθάδε κεῖται, θάρσιον οὐδεὶς ἀθάνατος, etc.;
8. the word *Shalom*.

However, these kinds of listings are only suggestive. In each case, the evidence must be scrutinized carefully, as some of these elements have been proven to occur also in early Christian epigraphy, or in pagan context (e.g., the terms συναγωγή, προσευχή).⁸

The epigraphic habit of the province Pannonia was very similar to other early Romanized western provinces. The language of the inscriptions is mostly Latin; besides the approximately 6,000 Latin inscriptions, only some 50 Greek texts have turned up in Pannonia. This means that only about one percent of the epigraphic material is Greek.⁹ Greek inscriptions were mostly erected by people who had come from the East and who were only temporarily staying in the province, such as Syrian merchants in Sirmium.

7 Based on Scheiber, *Jewish Inscriptions*, 14; J. Oehler, "Epigraphische Beiträge zur Geschichte des Judentums," *MGWJ* 53 (1909): 525-38 (528); Laurence H. Kant, "Jewish Inscriptions in Greek and Latin," *ANRW* 20.2:671-713.

8 For the *proseucha* of the Hypsistarians, see Stephen Mitchell, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos between Pagans, Jews and Christians," in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (eds. P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 92-93, quoting Epiphanius, *Panarion* 80.1-2 as a primary source.

9 Péter Kovács, "Notes on the 'Jewish' Inscriptions in Pannonia," *JA/J* 1 (2010): 160.

It is interesting to observe the Greek names in the Pannonian onomastic materials. About eight percent of the names are Greek, and the inscriptions bearing them are mostly dated to the third century C.E.¹⁰ This also proves that after the heavy losses of the Marcomannic wars under Marcus Aurelius (166-180 C.E.), the population of the province changed and new troops, merchants, and other settlers arrived, many of them from the East. Alongside the Pannonian limes (e.g., Brigetio, Aquincum, Intercisa), Oriental people are encountered in what were clearly much higher numbers than ever before.

According to the most recent study about Jewish inscriptions in Pannonia by Péter Kovács, there are only six inscriptions that are of clear Jewish origin.¹¹ In the following, I give a brief introduction to them, listing them according to the place they were found.

Albertirsa (Aquincum?)

The first of the Jewish inscriptions comes most probably from Aquincum and bears two inscriptions¹² (now in the Hungarian National Museum, Inv. Nr. 62.70.1; see Figure 1).¹³ The earlier, original one is from the Severan period and is connected with the portrait of the stela depicting a family: mother, father, and a son. Below these figures, a pagan sacrificial scene can be seen. The secondary inscription can be found in the tympanum (Figure 2). It is written in Latin with Greek characters, except the Greek formula εἰς θεῶς. The stela was most probably chosen profusely for the secondary usage, as the inscription also describes a family with a son with the names Anastasius, Decusanis, and Beniamis (Figure 3). The menorah in the tympanum was placed directly in the rosette, also proving the secondary usage.

According to Kovács,¹⁴ the Jewish inscription must be dated after the Severan period, but its closer dating is uncertain. A date in the second half

10 Ibid., 160.

11 Ibid., 161.

12 The text of the original inscriptions is: [D(is) M(anibus)] / bon(a)ememoriae / Cl(audiae) Maximillae / q(ui) vixit ann(os) XXV / et Dom(itio) Domnioⁿⁱ qui d(e)f(unctus) est in / R(a) etiaconiugiei/usq(ui) v(ixit) ann(os) XXXVII / Aur(elia) Urbana et In/genuasororibene/^omerenti. The secondary inscription is: ΜΗΜΟΡΙΑ ΑΝΕΣΤΑΣΙΟ ΕΤ ΔΗΚΟΥΣΑΝΙ | ΕΤ ΒΗΝΕΙΑΜΙ {ΕΤ} ΦΕΙΛΑΕΙΩ | ΝΟΣΤΡΩ | ΕΙΣ ΘΕΩΣ | ΕΙΣ ΘΕΩΣ | ΕΙΣ ΘΕΩΣ.

13 CIL 3, 10611 = ILCV 4959 = IGRR 1, 536 = CIJ 675 = P. Kovács, ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum Pannonicarum* (= CIGP) (Hungarian Polis Studies 15; Debrecen: Pan libri, 2007), 101; David Noy, Alexander Panayotov, and Hanswulf Bloedhorn, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis I: Eastern Europe* (TSAJ 101; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), Pan 2; Scheiber, *Jewish Inscriptions*, 19-25; CIL 3, 10611; Kovács, "Notes," 162-63; Berger, *Der Menora-Ring*, 107-09.

14 Kovács, "Notes," 163.

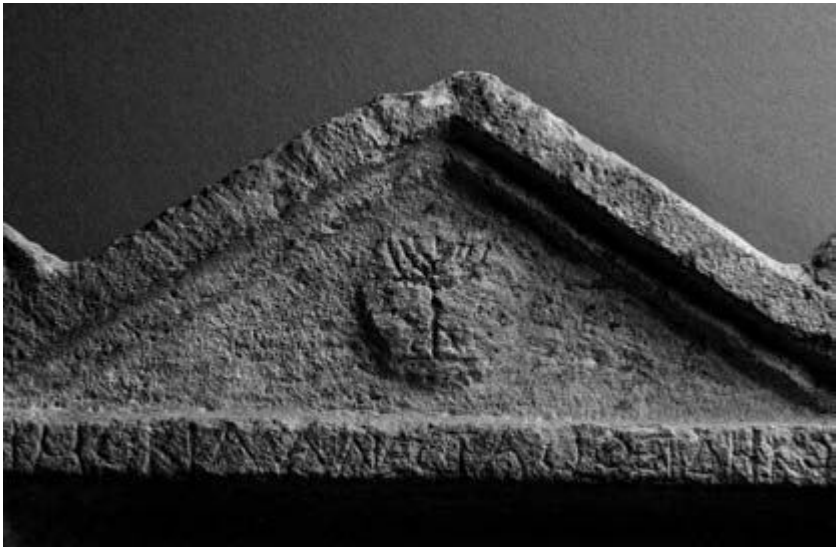
Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



of the third or even the fourth century C.E. cannot be ruled out. The Jewish family had probably immigrated to the province in a slightly earlier period. The composer of the text spoke Latin but still used Greek characters. This can be compared to the use of language in the first Christian communities of the province. Many Christians retained Greek cognomina (cf. the names of the Pannonian martyrs) but otherwise used Latin.¹⁵ The obvious parallel is Victorinus, the bishop of Poetovio who was martyred in the beginning of the fourth century. Jerome described him as *non aeque Latine ut Graece noverat* “not equally familiar with Latin and Greek” and regarded his works that were written in Latin “noble in thought” but “inferior in style.” (Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 74.)¹⁶

Brigetio

The second inscription with a high probability of having Jewish origins is a building inscription from Brigetio.¹⁷ The dedication is to *Deo M[agno]/Aeter[no]*. The object of the dedication is the fragmentary word [...]gam. This is supposed to be “synagoga” in the accusative and, according to István Tóth,¹⁸ the letters that follow (PR) were probably the first letters of the term *pr[oseucham]*. Péter Kovács rather reconstructs them as *pr[o sal(ute) Aug(usti)]*, based on the fact that other *Deus Aeternus* inscriptions from Pannonia were also erected for the welfare of the emperors.

It is interesting to examine the expression *Deus Aeternus*. The identification of it with the God of the Jews is often disputed and questioned. Several gods of the Graeco-Roman pantheon had the epithet *aeternus* (eg., Iovi Optimo Maximo [IOM=Iuppiter], Dolichenus, Mitras/Sol, etc.), where a Jewish context is very unlikely. In the case of *theos hypsistos*, the deity also had the epithet μέγας, in Latin inscriptions *magnus* (e.g., from Fayoum). The name of the female dedicator of the inscription found in Brigetio is *Claudia P[ia]*. However, the identification of *Deus Magnus Aeternus* with the God of the Jews is questionable, as several gods of the Graeco-Roman pantheon also

15 Kovács, “Christianity and the Greek Language in Pannonia,” *Acta Antiqua Hungarica* 43 (2003): 113–24.

16 Kovács, “Notes,” 163, fn. 21 quoting M. Dulaey, *Victorine de Poetovio, premier exegete latin* (Collections des Études Augustiniennes: Série Antiquité 139; Paris: Inst. des Études Augustiniennes, 1993).

17 CIL 3, 10998 = RIU 440 = AE 1995, 1257 = Berger, *Der Menora-Ring*, 122–23. Text: *Deo M[agno]/Aeter[no synago]/gam PR[...] / a [solo] / Claudia P[ia? filio]/quepecun[iasua] / fecit ex v[oto]*.

18 He was the first to identify the inscription as Jewish. Cf. István Tóth, “Jüdische Gemeinde in dem römischen Pannonien,” *Specimina Nova* 10 (1995): 179–86.

shared the epithet *aeternus*. From Palmyra we know a bilingual altar¹⁹ where *theos hypsistos* was translated as IOM. It is clear that the translation is not word-for-word, since *aeternus* cannot mean *hypsistos*. Studying the names of the worshippers of these gods shows that in many cases they were of Eastern origin. Franz Cumont even supposed that *Aeternus* was a Syrian sidereal god.²⁰ The question of whether *deus aeternus* is the Latin equivalent of *theos hypsistos* has remained unsolved from the time of Cumont. Other options that have been forwarded in the scholarly discussion include identifying *theos hypsistos* with the Jewish God or with the God of the Godfearers / Hypsistarians / Messalians or with an unnamed Syrian god. Paul Trebilco concludes that “Hypsistos was used as a way of designating Yahweh in the intertestamental period and as an appropriate name for God which could be put in the mouth of pagans in Jewish literature.”²¹ *Theos hypsistos* or *Hypsistos* alone is used to denote the Jewish God in the New Testament by Mark, by Luke both in his Gospel and in Acts, and in the *Epistle to the Hebrews*.²² The Jewish influence is beyond dispute.

It should also be noted that the Jews were not the only ones who had synagogues in antiquity. The already mentioned hypsistarians had them as well – e.g., an archisynagogus of Zeus Hypsistos is known from Pydna.²³ These observations notwithstanding, we may conclude that this restored inscription from Brigetio with the formulae used in it can be considered Jewish.

Intercisa

The third inscription widely held as Jewish is a building inscription from Intercisa (Figure 4).²⁴ It is, however, also widely disputed, for several reasons, including the name of the dedicator that appears to be Cosmius, and the reading and the meaning of the last lines. For our purposes, the reading of

19 SEG 34, 1456.

20 Franz Cumont, “Les dieux éternels des inscriptions latines,” *RA* 11 (1888): 184–93.

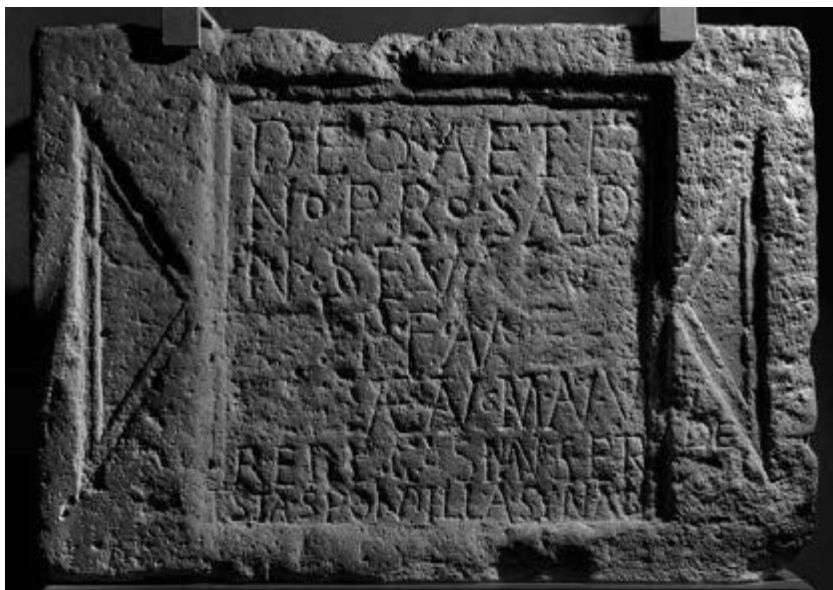
21 Paul R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 129.

22 Luke 1:32, 35, 76; 6:35; 8:28; Mark 5:7; Acts 7:48; 16:17; Heb. 7:1.

23 G. H. R. Horsley, ed., *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1976. Vol. I.* (North Ryde: The Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1981), 26–27.

24 CIL 3, 3327 = CIL 3, 10301 = ILS 3981 = RIU 1051 = AE 1990, 823 = Scheiber, *Jewish Inscriptions*, 25–31 No 3 = Noy, Panayotov, and Bloedhorn, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis I*, Pan 3 = Berger, *Der Menora-Ring*, 112–15. Text: *Deo Aeter/no pro sal(ute) d(omini) / n(ostr)i Sev(eri) [[Alexan]] / [[dr]]i P(ii) F(elicis) Aug(usti) e[[t] lul(iae)]] / [[Mamae]]ae Aug(ustae) mat(ris) Aug(usti) vot(um) / red(didit) l(ibens) Cosmius pr(ae)positus / sta(tionis) Spondill(...) a synag(oga) / lud(a)eor(um).*

Figure 4



the last lines is most relevant. The text has been reconstructed as *sta(tionis) Spondill(...)* a *synag(oga)* / *Iud(a)eor(um)*. Based on former studies, the most probable explanation comes from David Noy. According to him, Spondill(...) is a place name and the word *synag(oga)* denotes Cosmius's origin, which means that it does not refer to a building but to the Jewish community in Intercisa.²⁵ The stone monument was erected for the welfare of Severus Alexander and his mother. The emperor with Syrian origin was naturally very popular among Syrians and other oriental people, including Jews.²⁶

Mursa

The fourth inscription is a fragmentary limestone slab from Mursa²⁷ which was erected for the welfare of the Emperor Septimius Severus and the imperial family. According to the epigraphical calculations based on the centred

²⁵ Noy, Panayotov, and Bloedhorn, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis* I, 13.

²⁶ Kovács, "Notes," 167, quoting *Historia Augusta, vita SeveriAlexandri* 22.4; 29.2.

²⁷ Scheiber, *Jewish Inscriptions*, 51-55 No. 8 = Noy, Panayotov, and Bloedhorn, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis* I, Pan 5 = Berger, *Der Menora-Ring*, 110-12 I4. [*DeoAet(erno) (?) Im]pp(eratorum)* / [*Caess(arum) L(uci)SeptimiSeveriPe]rtinacis* / [*et M(arci)AureliAntoniniPii]Augg(ustorum)* / [*et L(uci)SeptimiGetae nob(ilissimi)Caes(aris)]* / [*et Iuliae Aug(ustae) mat(ris)cas]trorum* / [...]
ndus / [... *pro]seucham* / [... *vetu]state* / [*corruptamsumptusuo a so]lo* / [*restituit?*].

lines,²⁸ the name of the deity was probably abbreviated as *Deo Aet(erno)*. The construction work to which this inscription refers can most probably be dated between 198 and 202 C.E. A long series of (re)building inscriptions are known from Pannonia from this period. This also indicates a kind of Severan industrial boom in the province and the provincials' loyalty towards their former governor and now emperor Septimius Severus. Scholars have identified this inscription as Jewish, based on the word *proseucha*. However, as I have noted above, the Messalians also built *proseuchas* as "proper churches."²⁹ Based on the rebuilding mentioned in the Mursa inscription, it is certain that the Mursa *proseucha* already existed in the Hadrianic *colonia Aelia*.

Siklós

The fifth inscription from Siklós³⁰ was the first Jewish inscription that scholars discovered from Pannonia. As early as in 1479, the famous humanist Felice Feliciano (Antiquus) described forty-one inscriptions on his way from Italy to Buda. Unfortunately, the monument got lost and all that we now know of it is based on Feliciano's drawing. It depicts a funerary inscription of *Septimae Mariae Iudaeae*. The adjective *Iudaea* shows that Septimia Maria was of Jewish origin which is corroborated by the cognomen Maria. According to Ross Kraemer,³¹ Heikki Solin,³² and Margaret Williams,³³ *Iudaea* cannot be a personal name, nor can it indicate the woman's geographical origin or nationality, since this would have been referred to as the province Syria/Palestina (*Surus/a* or *Paleastinus/a*). She was a Roman citizen, and the imperial *gentilicium* Septimia shows that her father received the Roman citizenship under Septimius Severus.

28 Kovács, "Notes," 168.

29 Epiphanius, *Panarion* 80. 1-2, trans. Amidon. Gregory of Nazianzus states that "the cult was a mixture of two elements, Hellenic error and adherence to the Jewish law." *Orations* 18.5 (PG 35.990).

30 CIL 3, 3688 = ILCV 4918 = Scheiber, *Jewish Inscriptions*, 42-44 No 7 = Noy, Panayotov, and Bloedhorn, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis I*, Pan 4 = Berger, *Der Menora-Ring*, 109-10. *D(is) M(anibus) / Septimae Mariae / Iudaeae quae vixit annis / XVIII Actia / Sabinilla mater*.

31 Ross S. Kraemer, "On the Meaning of the 'Jew' in Graeco-Roman inscriptions," *HTR* 82 (1989):41-42, 49; Ross S. Kraemer, "Jewish Tuna and Christian Fish: Identifying Religious Affiliation in Epigraphic Sources," *HTR* 84 (1991): 156-57.

32 Heikki Solin, "Juden und Syrer im westlichen Teil der römischen Welt: Eine ethnisch-demographische Studie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der sprachlichen Zustände," *ANRW* 29: 647-51.

33 Margaret H. Williams, "The Meaning and Function of *Ioudaios* in Graeco-Roman Inscriptions," *ZPE* 116 (1997): 250, 253.

Figure 5



Solva

Maybe the most obviously Jewish inscription from Pannonia – the one from which the quote in the title of my essay is taken – is the one from Solva (today Esztergom, Hungary).³⁴ A menorah is cut into the stone and above, there are three lines of text (Figure 5). The text mentions Iudas and his wife Cassia. The inscription is very interesting from a grammatical point of view, too, since it mixes Greek and Latin words and Latin words are written in Greek characters. It can be a sign of the fact that newly immigrated people wanted to erect Latin inscriptions but did not yet have enough knowledge to phrase them properly. The inscription is dated to the third century C.E.³⁵

34 CIL 3, 10599 = IGRRP 533 = RIU 787 = ILCV 04896 = CIGP 86 = CIJ 676 = Scheiber, *Jewish Inscriptions*, 16–19, No. 1 = Noy, Panayotov, and Bloedhorn, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis I*, Pann 1 = Berger, *Der Menora-Ring*, 104–106. *Memoria Iudati patiri | et memoria Kassie | eul(og...a)*.

35 Kovács, “Notes,” 172.

There is a seventh inscription relating to Pannonian Jews, even though it comes from outside of the province (from Oescus, Moesia).³⁶ The inscription refers to a certain Maximinus Pannonius, the father of Ioses who was *archisynagogus* and *principalis* and who served in the army (in the legio V Macedonica). This inscription demonstrates the relationship between the already Romanized Pannonian Jews and the Balkan provinces.

These inscriptions discussed above all belong to the civilian area of Jewish life. In addition, I also mention briefly the military field. The *cohors I miliaria Hemesenorum civium Romanorum sagittaria equitata* (mounted double cohort of Hemesan archers of Roman citizenship) arrived at Intercisa in 175 C.E. together with other Syrian troops³⁷ and changed the population of the settlement significantly. As the inscription of Cosmius (see above) shows, there was a synagogue in Intercisa which makes it likely that there were Jews among the cohort. Based on names, we cannot state with certainty that everyone bearing a Semitic name was Jewish. We also know that in later times there were Jews in military service in Emesa, since a fourth-century inscription has been found in Concordia, Italy with the phrase *numerous regi(onis) Emesenorum Iudaeorum*.³⁸ It is interesting to note that Jewish settlers in Pannonia are usually attested in towns such as Brigetio and Aquincum where a community of Syrian soldiers and veterans already existed.

To summarize, epigraphic evidence proves Jewish presence in eastern Pannonia, or Pannonia Inferior, from the Severan period onwards. Jews had their own synagogues in Brigetio, Mursa, and Intercisa. These were places where other people of Eastern origin, mainly Syrians, were present too. Based on the criteria of identifying Jewish inscriptions mentioned above, only six of the 6,000 known Pannonian inscriptions can be treated as Jewish. This represents only one-tenth of a percent.

4. Other Evidence of Jewish Presence in Pannonia

In addition to the inscriptional evidence, there are also smaller finds relevant for the topic. In the following, I will not examine all Jewish-related

36 AE 1914, 94 = CIJ 681 = ILBulg 67 = Noy, Panayotov, and Bloedhorn, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis I*, Moes1. ... / Iosesarc(h)isina(gogus?) / et principales(!) / filiusMaximini / Pannoni sibi et / Qyriae(!)co(n)iugi / sui vivo suome/moriadedita/vit.

37 Barnabás Lőrincz, *Die Hilfstruppen in Pannonien während der Prinzipatszeit* (Wiener Archäologische Studien 3; Wien: Forschungsgesellschaft Wiener Stadtarchäologie, 2001), 35–36, n. 23.

38 CIL 5, 8764 = ILCV 4857 = JIWE 1, 6.

items found in Pannonia, as most of them such as rings, lead seals, weights, graffiti, and clay lamps do not add important details to historical questions related to the Roman power. Instead, I will concentrate on two items that have been used as magical amulets.

Magical Objects

An important element in the Jewish-related material from Roman Pannonia is related to Greek magic. Several names and terms that most probably have a Hebrew/Jewish origin are carved onto gemstones, lead, silver, or golden lamellas. Many of these items have been dated to the second, third, and fourth centuries C.E. An especially noteworthy example is a bulla found in Aquincum that contains a coin of Trajan and a folded silver lamella with various characters and a hieratic symbol (κ₃) meaning “spirit.” The following Hebrew letters can be read on the lamella: אור and חור. The first is obviously “light”, while the latter is in mirror writing *ruah*, “spirit”.³⁹

There are two other smaller finds from Carnuntum that are exceptional compared to the average style of gemstones from the region. Both of them have an inscription with Jewish elements and – unlike most gemstones from Carnuntum – there are no images on them. The text of the first item⁴⁰ runs:

IAHIEHIA/WCABAWT/ΑΔΩΝΑΙΕ/ΕΛΩΑΙ ✕

IaëieēIaōSabaōth, Adōnaie, Elōai ✕

Here the letters of the tetragrammaton are used both combined and together with other divine names known from Jewish literature: *Sabaoth*, *Adonai* (“Lord”), and *Eloai* (“my God”). The Greek transcriptions of these names are similar to the ones on the Halbturn amulet (to which I return below). This, together with the four divine names, creates an impression of a Jewish magic device. The possibility of Jewish origin in the case of this gemstone is strengthened by the fact that the last character of the text is – according to Armin Lange – a Hebrew ✕. This is probably an abbreviation of the preceding Greek word *Eloai*.⁴¹

39 György Németh, “Jewish Elements in the Greek Magic of Pannonia,” *JAJ* 1 (2010): 187–88.

40 Gemstone, KHM AS 9, 2724; G. Dembski, *Die Antiken Gemmen und Kameen aus Carnuntum* (Wien: Phoibos, 2005), 110; Kovács, CIGP 46.

41 In his recent history of Jewish magic, Gideon Bohak summarizes the significance of Hebrew characters on magic devices as follows: “The presence of Hebrew or Aramaic, either in square script or in Greek transliteration is a sure sign of Jewish authorship” in Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 209.

The other item is a bone/ivory amulet dated to the third or fourth century C.E. It bears the following inscription:

OME/ΓACΘEO/CABPAA/MICAK/IAKWΒ

The great God – Abraam, Isak, Iakob.

At first sight, this amulet might seem to be obviously Jewish but the study of pagan magic papyri suggests caution, for they show a widespread usage of the term “great God”⁴² in clearly non-Jewish materials, sometimes even combined with the names of the three patriarchs.⁴³ Thus, we cannot prove with certainty the Jewishness of these amulets. However, it is certain that whoever made them (or whoever edited the collection of the samples for cutters) was influenced by Jewish traditions.

The Halbturn Amulet

Archaeological finds that might be classified as Jewish always attract great scholarly and general interest. However, because of the many difficulties in researching them, it often takes some time until they are discussed in their proper context. This has been the case with the so-called “Halbturn amulet”.⁴⁴ This relatively recent find adds important information to our historical reconstruction of the Jewish presence in Pannonia. In the cemetery of the eastern part of the Roman site at Halbturn (Halbturn I), about 30 kilometres north of the provincial capital city Carnuntum, excavations were conducted between 1986 and 2002. In the graveyard that contains more than 300 graves, a grave of a small child was discovered in 2000. The pit contained a wooden coffin, a piece of jewellery, a glass vessel, some pottery, a lamp and a coin, and most probably a *sestertius*, dated between

42 E.g. PGM 4.475-829: applied for Mithras.

43 E.g. PGM 13.815-816

44 Publications about the amulet: M. Bar Asher, “The Verse ‘Shema Israel’ in a Greek Transliteration, found in an Ancient Amulet,” *Aqadem* 36 (2008): 3, 6-7; Esther Eshel, Hanan Eshel, and Armin Lange, “‘Hear, O Israel’ in Gold: An Ancient Amulet from Halbturn in Austria,” *JA* 1 (2010): 43-64; Nives Doneus and Armin Lange, eds., *Golden Words: An Ancient Jewish Amulet from Austria and the Jewish Presence in Roman Pannonia*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010) = *JA* 1/2 (2010); Nives Doneus, “The Roman Child and the Jewish Amulet,” *JA* 1 (2010): 146-153; Esther Eshel and Armin Lange, “‘The Lord Is One’: How Its Meaning Changed,” *BAR* 39/3 (May/June 2013) 58-65; Hans Taeuber, “Reading and Dating the Halbturn Amulet,” *JA* 1 (2010): 154-58.

161 and 251 C.E.⁴⁵ Based on the examination of these grave objects, only a *terminus post quem* of 161-251 can be determined.⁴⁶

What especially raised scholarly attention was the silver piece of jewelry that appeared to be an amulet-capsule. The capsule was unornamented. Inside of it a golden lamella, folded and wrapped to form a scroll, was found. The scroll contained the words of the prayer *shema Yisrael* written with Greek characters. As such, this archaeological information does not reveal anything certain about the religious beliefs of those who buried the child. An amulet with the Jewish prayer does not automatically mean that the family who placed it with the child had any connections with the Jewish religion. They might have simply bought this item as a protective amulet in the capital city where a high diversity of peoples from all over the Roman Empire met with different religious beliefs and gods.

The text of the amulet reads: "Hear Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is One." As can be seen, the archaeological context leaves little doubt that the amulet was used for apotropaic purposes. What makes it unusual is its use of the Biblical text; it quotes *Deuteronomium* verbatim (Deut. 6:4). This type of a direct quotation of a Biblical text is a strong proof of the Jewish origin of the amulet. As Gideon Bohak states in his work *Ancient Jewish Magic*, "given the general disinterest among the pagan magicians in the Hebrew Bible or in its Greek translation, we may be fairly certain that the more specifically biblical elements a text displays, the less likely it is to be a pagan composition."⁴⁷ During late antiquity, the quote became a powerful magic device when the *shema* acquired a new apotropaic function as part of a *mezuzah* on doorposts or gates. In the case of the Halbtorn amulet, the small gold tablet was found in a capsule, and as it was put into the grave of a child, it most probably had a protective function. Based on these observations, it can be classified as a *phylakterion*.⁴⁸ Several *phylakteria* have been found in the vicinity of Halbtorn, but their examination shows a major difference: none of them contain any scrolls like the one discussed here, nor could they be connected to a Jewish context. Hans Taeuber dates the lamella to the period between the second half of the second century and third century C.E.⁴⁹

45 Doneus, "The Roman Child," 151.

46 Ibid., 152.

47 Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 210.

48 Taeuber, "Reading and Dating," 155.

49 Ibid., 158.

Coins

Another type of Jewish-related objects are coins that derive from the First and Second Jewish revolts. In Carnuntum alone, three bronze coins of the First Jewish revolt and two of the Bar Kochba Revolt have been found. The evaluation of these finds, however, is extremely problematic. Most of them were not found *in situ*; nor do we know anything about their owners. Thus, there is a strong possibility that military personnel who might have been fighting against the Jews in the two revolts carried them home to Pannonia from Judaea. Coins circulated widely all over the empire, and they could always have arrived in Pannonia at any given time in someone's pocket.⁵⁰ For this reason, coins cannot be treated as decisive evidence for the presence of Jews in Pannonia.

5. A Newly Discovered Inscription from Carnuntum

After this summary of Jewish finds from the province of Pannonia, I briefly discuss a new find – a recently discovered inscription from Carnuntum. The publication and research of the inscription itself and of its surrounding materials are still in progress, but a short overview of this extremely important find sheds light on what kinds of problems are involved in the research of identifying Jewish-related finds in the Roman provinces.

An inscription in secondary usage was found in 2009 in the civilian town of Carnuntum. It was used as part of a late antique water-conduit. Unfortunately, only a part of the stone was unearthed. Its height is 60 cm, its width 89 cm, and its depth 20.5 cm. What makes this newly discovered inscription extremely valuable is its early date. Based on the use of the name of the province, on palaeography, and the use of the *tria nomina*, it can be dated to 71-135 C.E. If this is correct, this would make it the earliest known written evidence about Jews in Pannonia. A detailed discussion of the inscription is being prepared in Vienna by Franziska Beutler, but the latest catalogue of the *Museum Carnuntinum* already provides a short summary of it.

⁵⁰ Pfisterer, "Ethnic Identity," 200-206.

The inscription reads as follows:

[M.?]Mulviu[s ...] / [...] domo Iudaeus an[norum ...] / [... ne]gotians h(ic)
s(itus) e(st) M(arcus)Mul[vius...] / [...]s et M(arcus)MulviusAma[...] / [...]
stus e[t M(arcus)?]MulviusPro[...] / [...]s M[...] M(arcus)Mulviu[s ...] / [...]

[Marcus?] Mulviu[s...] / [...] from Iudaea (?), yea[rs old ...] / [... tra]desman,
lies here buried. Marcus Mul[vius...] / [...] and Marcus MulviusAma[...]
/ [...]stus a[nd Marcus]Mulvius Pro[...] / [...]s M[...] Marcus Mulviu[s ...]
/ [...].⁵¹

The inscription was most probably the tombstone of a certain Marcus Mulvius; his cognomen is missing. He was a merchant or a financier (*negotians*) from *Iudaea*. After this information, the inscription contains at least five names of people who were most probably relatives of Mulvius or the people who freed him. It is likely that he came from *Iudaea* to Carnuntum with the *Legio XV Apollinaris* after the First Jewish War. As the province of *Iudaea* was renamed *Syria-Palestina* after the Bar Kochba revolt in 135 C.E., this year serves as a *terminus ante quem* for the inscription.

Another interesting detail in this inscription is the expression *domo Iudaeus*. We know, for example, of an inscription in Aquincum denoting a soldier from Syria-Palestina with the term *domo Syria Palaestina*.⁵² This shows that the designation for a province of origin as *domo* + a geographical name is not without parallels. This parallel example is also noteworthy, as it clearly shows the difference in the usage of the name of the province before and after the Bar Kochba revolt. Mulvius is an Italicus *nomen gentile*. A person within the timeframe of 71-135 C.E. could only have born if he was an earlier freed slave. Most probably he came to Carnuntum with his master in a troop where he served as a legionary. Later, this Jewish slave was freed, and he received the name of his master as well as Roman citizenship.

⁵¹ Franz Humer and Gabriele Kremer (eds.), *Götterbilder – Menschenbilder: Religion und Kulte in Carnuntum* (Katalog des Niederösterreichischen Landesmuseums 498; Bad Deutsch-Altenburg: Amt der NÖ Landesregierung, Abteilung Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2011), 435.

⁵² Scheiber, *Jewish Inscriptions*, 67; Valentin Kuzsinszky, *Aquincum: Ausgrabungen und Funde* (Budapest, 1934), 176 No. 285; TitAq 499.

6. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, it is interesting to reflect whether we can speak about a Jewish diaspora community in Pannonia. In his introduction to the volume *Negotiating Diasporas*, John Barclay writes about the question of power and politics in the following way: "Diaspora communities are typically sites of contested power, both internal contests over the interpretation of 'tradition' and contests with the 'host' community or with other diasporas."⁵³ Based on the few sources that we have, we cannot unambiguously prove the existence of a Jewish community. It seems that we cannot speak of a diaspora community in Pannonia with any special tradition that had to contest with the "host" nation. What we can see, and what I hope I have managed to prove with the help of the most recent finds from Pannonia, is that at least some Jews came to the province not only right after but even before the Marcomannic Wars. During the Severan period (193-235 C.E.), the presence of Jews in Pannonia appears to have intensified. This fits in well with the generally ascertainable influx of people from the East, especially Syrians. There must have been at least individual Jews present in Pannonia already from the second century onward. From the third century onward, we have clear evidence of Jewish presence in the province.

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Part II

Contextualizing New Testament Texts with the Empire

Imperial Politics in Paul

Scholarly Phantom or Actual Textual Phenomenon?

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1. Ends and Means of the Essay

As recent scholars working on the relationship between the New Testament texts and the imperial cult have noticed, the renewed interest in the topic has an important pre-history in scholarship. Almost a century ago, Adolf Deissmann was among the first scholars to emphasize the importance that should be attributed to the imperial cult for a proper contextualizing cultural framework for the interpretation of the New Testament texts in general and the Pauline letters and the *Apocalypse of John* in particular. Before I approach the specific topic of this essay, namely to raise the question on the bearing of the imperial cult for an appropriate historical appreciation of the Pauline letters, I will take a closer look at Deissmann's original contribution. This is germane not only to antiquarian interest in the history of scholarship but also with regard to the current discussion. Many of the questions and problems that loom large in the contemporary debate on the New Testament and the imperial cult may be already seen in Deissmann's work. A return to Deissmann's work on the imperial cult may, therefore, help us to attain a more lucid understanding pertaining to the discussion of contemporary scholarship on the relationship between New Testament texts and the imperial cult.

I have divided the essay into three main sections. In the first section, I take up the question of the imperial cult and the New Testament in light of the previous history of scholarship. In the second main section, I proceed to take a closer look at some Pauline passages that appear particularly apt for the subject under scrutiny. In the third and final main section, which also constitutes the conclusion, I aim to provide an answer to the question whether, in fact, the imperial cult constitutes a particularly relevant contextualizing framework for the analysis of the Pauline letters, or whether it should be conceived of as a scholarly phantom stemming from particular perceptual filters of modern scholarship that primarily pertain to contemporary debates over the relationship between religion and society,

politics and Christianity.¹ In other words, I want to evoke a more thorough response to the germaneness of the imperial cult as an appropriate frame of reference for interpreting texts of the early Christ-movement, in this case with a particular focus on Paul. I think it is relevant in light of the number of monographs, collection of papers, articles, et cetera, currently being published on the topic.

2. The Imperial Cult as Contextualizing Framework for Interpreting Paul

In the context of a discussion about Paul's martyrological death, Deissmann in his book on Paul from 1925 (first edition 1911) observed how Paul's death bears witness to the uncompromising conflict between two cults that in the understanding of Deissmann were radically opposed to each other:

Paulus hat tatsächlich 'den Leib hingegeben' und, eines der Erstlingsopfer der weltgeschichtlichen Konfliktes zwischen Christuskult und Caesarenkult, im Märtyrertod die buchstäbliche Vollendung seiner Leidens- und Todesgemeinschaft mit dem Gekreuzigten erleben dürfen.²

A similar view permeated Deissmann's earlier book, *Licht vom Osten*, from 1923 (first edition 1908), where he extended the argument to include early Christian cult language in general. Deissmann underlined how he had found that

ein großer Teil der Begriffe schon der ältesten urchristlichen Kultsprache seine scharfe Prägung wiedererhält, wenn man ihn in seinem Kontrast zur Kultsprache der Kaiservergöttung betrachtet.³

1 Cf. the introduction by Hal Tausig, "Prologue: A Door Open," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 59 (2005): 1-5 and the review article by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Empire and Christian Testament Studies," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 59 (2005): 131-39.

2 Adolf Deissmann, *Paulus: Eine kultur- und religionsgeschichtliche Skizze* (2nd ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1925), 195, cf., idem, *Licht vom Osten: Das Neue Testament und die neuentdeckten Texte der hellenistisch-römischen Welt* (4th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1923), 331.

3 Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten*, 247, cf. 290.

Ultimately, Deissmann endorsed the view that

man muß doch nicht denken, Paulus und seine Glaubensgenossen seien mit geschlossenen Augen durch die Welt gegangen, unberührt von dem, was damals in den großen Städten die Gemüter bewegte.⁴

From Deissmann's perspective, the cult of Christ and that of the emperor stood irreconcilably opposed to each other. They were in numerous aspects parallel to each other and, therefore, had to engage in vitriolic polemics against the other.⁵ The proximity of the two in terms of similar religious claims ignites an indissoluble conflict:

Um so empfindlicher ist das Urchristentum dann freilich auf seinem eigensten Gebiete, auf das es seine ganze Leidenschaft konzentriert hat, dem religiösen: die Vergottung der Cäsaren ist ihm von Anbeginn an ein Greuel gewesen.⁶

Before I leave Deissmann, I shall briefly mention one last aspect of his conception, since it has a bearing on the contemporary debate on the relationship between the imperial cult and New Testament texts, i.e., the role he assigned to politics and his understanding of the social-historical stratification of the two cults. Whereas Deissmann argued that the imperial cult was a phenomenon with an exclusive impact on the cultural and social elite, he held that the nascent Christ-movement had a conspicuously different profile:

Insofern die religiöse Verehrung des Herrschers die letzte Krönung der Kultur der herrschenden Schichten ist, bedeutet der Widerwille des Urchristentums gegen den Kaiserkult tatsächlich auch eine Abgrenzung nach oben hin, und im weiteren Verlauf verbindet er sich da und dort mit im Judentum längst vorhandenen gewesenen politischen und sozialen Instinkten der Unterdrückten.⁷

Deissmann granted that, in its earliest stages, the Christ-movement was indifferent to political engagement. Under the influence of the insurgence of

4 Ibid., 289.

5 Ibid., 290.

6 Ibid., 286.

7 Ibid., 287.

Judaism against Rome, however, the Christ-movement became increasingly politically engaged, culminating with the *Apocalypse of John* in which:

die den von Anfang an vorhandenen religiösen Gegensatz zum Cäsarenkult stärker und stärker empfunden und dem christlichen Gewissen zuletzt mit untilgbarer Schrift eingeprägt hätten.⁸

Deissmann's view amply demonstrates how the discussion of the imperial cult and its relationship to formative Christianity is difficult to detach from contemporary concerns pertaining to the relationship between politics and religion, and religion and culture. A stance on this topic is likely to reflect more basic views on the (ideal) relation between culture and religion, and religion and state. At the centre of the discussion lies the moot question whether Christianity ultimately is a religion that finds itself in perpetual opposition to the "rulers of this world" or rather a religion that exhibits an ideology in pursuit of peace with the surrounding society. Normative elements are obviously involved although mostly concealed in the discussion. Should Christianity be of a predominantly sectarian nature or should it rather be a state church embracing the many? I do not mean to say that the current discussion of the subject is a mere reflection of contemporary concerns pertaining to the status of ideal Christianity in the present world. The element of presentism is inherent in any historical study,⁹ but the more it is made explicit, the greater the possibility to reduce the degree of falling prey to contemporary prejudices and of thinking in habitual ruts.

8 Ibid., 289.

9 Presentism designates the element that the past is always filtered through perceptual schemes of the present. There is a huge debate within the field of history in terms of epistemology as to how one should relate to the aspect of presentism in the way one conducts one's work. Dominick LaCapra has succinctly noted that "in the sort of historicism that is still prevalent among professional historians, one attempts to understand the past in its own terms and for its own sake, as if the past had its own terms and was there for its own sake. Today it is difficult to escape the idea that values at least affect one's choice of problems and that theoretical assumptions have something to do with the way one construes facts." Dominick LaCapra, *Soundings in Critical Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 195. See also Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 19-20, and, particularly, Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), 22-23. For a well-founded description on how to proceed in conducting historical examinations taking the element of presentism into account, see Michael E. Stone, *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 1-30.

3. Deissmann's Legacy to Contemporary Scholarship and Criticism of His View

The legacy of Deissmann has left us with a number of important questions which for various reasons have been left unanswered until the relatively recent resurgence of scholarly interest in the relationship between New Testament texts and the imperial cult. Obviously, there is a strong tint of romanticism lurking in Deissmann's understanding, which he shared with his partially congenial spirits at the History of Religions School of Göttingen, which more appropriately should be designated a circle of friends rather than a distinct school with a shared and clearly envisioned scholarly program.¹⁰ Deissmann's emphasis on the simplicity of the nascent Christ-movement and his social-historical assignment of it to the lower segments of the people convey an older romantic quest in the spirit of Herder for returning to the simple days of the past and for searching for the truth among the plain people. Correspondingly, Deissmann's allocation of the imperial cult to the elite strata of Roman society has proven false, since recent scholarship has documented how both elite and non-elite segments could be involved in the imperial cult at one level or another. Problematic is also his monolithic talk about the imperial cult as if it constituted one single and coherent entity across time and space.

Simon Price and Karl Galinsky among others have emphasized the diversity of the imperial cult, which never constituted one consistent phenomenon. Additionally, they have underlined how the imperial cult was frequently connected with that of other gods.¹¹ Similar to a number of recent scholars, Deissmann's work also suffers from the fact that it magnifies the imperial cult to a level which it never had. Mary Beard, Jon North, and Simon Price have rightfully underlined that what is nowadays referred to as the imperial cult comprised a diversity of phenomena located in very

10 Hermann Gunkel, "Gedächtnisrede auf Wilhelm Bousset," *Evangelische Freiheit* 20 (1920): 141-162, particularly 158; cf. Gunnar Sinn, *Christologie und Existenz: Rudolf Bultmanns Interpretation des paulinischen Christuszeugnisses* (TANZ 4; Tübingen, Francke, 1991), 7-8; Michael Murrmann-Kahl, *Die entzauberte Heilsgeschichte: Der Historismus erobert die Theologie 1880-1920* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1992), 296-97, 305-306.

11 Simon R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 145-56; Karl Galinsky, "The Cult of the Roman Emperor: Uniter or Divider?" in *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult*, (eds. Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 1-21, particularly 4-5.

different contexts.¹² They strongly accentuate that “there is no such thing as ‘the imperial cult.’”¹³ In a response to Karl Galinsky’s previously mentioned essay, Steven Friesen has for the same reason made the argument that we should stop speaking of the imperial cult and rather make use of the plural “imperial cults”, thereby stressing the multifariousness of the phenomenon.¹⁴ However sensible such a suggestion may sound, it suffers from a basic philosophical flaw stemming from the lack of differentiation between concept and phenomenon.¹⁵ It is a misunderstanding to think that adding a plural “-s” to second-order concepts is a remedy for the acknowledgement of them as heterogeneous phenomena at the cultural and social level. It is better to underline the diverse nature of the phenomenon at the level of cultural and social reality and to retain the concept as a concept proper.

Needless to say, the same criticism posed with respect to the imperial cult applies to the elevation of the Christ-movement to constitute the other element of a binary mapping of the Roman world. The implication is that in terms of dominant forms of religiosity, the Roman world was primarily determined by the dual entities of imperial cult and formative Christianity.¹⁶

12 Although brief, see the excellent summary of differences and similarities between the Eastern and the Western part of the Empire with respect to the imperial cult in Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 297–316.

13 Mary Beard, John North, and Simon R. F. Price, *Religions of Rome. Volume I: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 348; cf. Carlos F. Noreña, “The Early Imperial Monarchy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies* (eds. Alessandro Barchiesi and Walter Scheidel; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 533–546, particularly 540, and James B. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (London: Blackwell, 2007), 149. See most importantly the thorough works of Fishwick on the imperial cult in the Latin West; Duncan Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West: Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire. Volume I.1–3* (Leiden: Brill, 1987–2002). Fishwick’s work ought to be compared with the likewise important work of Price (*Rituals and Power*) that focuses on the imperial cult in Asia Minor. Cf. William van Andringa, “Religion and the Integration of Cities in the Empire in the Second Century AD: The Creation of a Common Language,” in *A Companion to Roman Religion* (ed. Jörg Rüpke; Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 83–95, particularly 83–88. In addition, the important work by Harrison should be called to mind.

14 Steven J. Friesen, “Normal Religion, or, Words Fail Us: A Response to Karl Galinsky’s ‘The Cult of the Roman Emperor: Uniter or Divider?’” in *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult* (eds. Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 23–26, citation on p. 24.

15 I have directed the same criticism against those scholars who in an appreciation of the multiplicity of Judaism and Christianity have chosen to speak of them in the plural. See, for instance, Anders Klostergaard Petersen, “Alexandrian Judaism: Rethinking a Problematical Cultural Category,” in *Alexandria: A Cultural and Religious Melting Pot* (eds. George Hinge and Jens Krasilnikoff; Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009), 128–30.

16 Cf. the criticism in Price, *Rituals and Power*, 14.

The beginning of Donald L. Jones's essay in his article on Christianity and the Imperial cult published in the *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* is an indicative example of this tendency. Jones contends that "from the perspective of early Christianity, the worst abuse in the Roman Empire was the imperial cult. Honors which should be reserved for God alone could not be bestowed upon men."¹⁷ Equally problematic are Deissmann's clear-cut distinctions between the Christ-movement and Judaism as if they were two separate and autonomous entities, but in that regard his understanding is a reflection of the predominant view of his generation of scholarship. What is also anachronistically skewed are his categorical distinctions between religion and politics which defy the evidence of a world where religion and culture – as well as politics – were closely intertwined. In that regard, the anachronistic failure to appreciate the entanglement of the imperial cult with what we designate as religion continues to linger on in wide trajectories of the current debate on the issue. What we in the Western world in particular have during a long intellectual process become accustomed to conceive of as relatively autonomous domains were intrinsically related in the ancient world. Be that as it may, despite the criticism that can be raised against Deissmann, I basically think that he was right in his over-all assessment that

man muß doch nicht denken, Paulus und seine Glaubensgenossen seien mit geschlossenen Augen durch die Welt gegangen, unberührt von dem, was damals in den großen Städten die Gemüter bewegte,¹⁸

that is, the prevalence of the "imperial cult" expressed in terms of a continuous presence with respect to both time and space. However, it is crucial that we add important qualifications to Deissmann's statement. As it stands, the assertion reflects an over-estimation of the impact of the imperial cult on daily life in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. Therefore, we need to take a closer look at the impact of the imperial cult on daily life.

Despite regional and temporal differences, the ubiquity of the imperial cult was persistent throughout the Empire. Festivals and games including processions and sacrifices devoted to the emperor or the imperial family exhibited the presence of the cult in terms of temporality, while temples, shrines, triumphal arches, public baths, theatres of different types, statues, images, honorary inscriptions, gemmae, etc. marked its materialization in terms of space. Indeed, Paul and his peers would have had to be rather blind

17 Donald L. Jones, "Christianity and the Roman Imperial Cult", in *ANRW* 23.2: 1023–54, 1023.

18 Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten*, 289.

in order to overlook the omnipresence and ubiquity of the imperial cult, understood in the comprehensive sense delineated above. All the more so if one also takes into account that in recent years there has been increasing research carried out to undermine the time-honored view that the imperial cult had a bearing on public life only. Inscriptions, statues, ornaments, oil lamps engraved with the image of the emperor, etc. found in the context of domestic space across the Empire provide ample evidence that the imperial cult also exerted its influence on private life. If, however, the imperial cult was as pervasive as these examples suggest, it is crucial to revisit Deissmann. To what extent can one really speak of two rivalling cults?

Undoubtedly, we are facing an asymmetrical relationship, since it is unlikely that the imperial cult – if, for a moment, we leave aside the moot question of its personification – would have paid special heed to a marginal movement originating in the most eastern part of the Empire. Although evidence exists that Rome eventually took a stance on the groups of Christ-adherents, from the perspective of Rome, the Christ-movement was a minor matter only. There is, as we have come to know from scholarly work in the last couple of decades, little evidence of systematically organized imperial persecutions of Christ-adherents across the Empire during the first two centuries C.E. In addition, we should also be careful not to lay too much stress on the “state” nature of the imperial cult as well as the Empire as such. In a provocative but highly suggestive essay, Christopher Ando has made the argument that the local nature of the imperial cult was, in fact, an important part of the “political” aims underpinning it. The essay yields the argument that

Rome sought to sunder pre-existing patterns of social and economic conduct, and it hoped thereby to prevent the realisation of solidarity against itself on the basis of regional, religious or ethnic identity. The principal strategies employed to achieve this were two: one concerned with the imposition and animation of new political geographies, through the drawing of boundaries and channeling of energies between and within provinces, assize districts, cities and towns; and the other aspiring to nurture local and regional socio-economic elites whose interests aligned and overlapped with those of Rome. These efforts were startlingly successful. They were so, moreover, in spite of the multiple heterogeneities that rived Rome and its subjects, regional and civic elites, and elites and their subaltern alike.¹⁹

19 Ando, Christopher, “Imperial identities,” in *Local Knowledge and Microidentities in the Imperial Greek World* (ed. Tim Whitmarsh; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 20; cf. 18–9.

But how, one might reasonably ask, does the situation look if we reverse the question and look at it from the perspective of early Christ-adherents? To what extent did the imperial cult feature in their thinking and social practices? Also at this level, it is important to acknowledge that we are confronted with an asymmetry, since it would be misleading to ascribe to early Christ-adherents the ability to relate to an abstract system that mostly exists by virtue of a modern scholarly construct. I am very sceptical about conceptualizations that not only speak about the Caesar religion but may take the argument as far as to claim with respect to, for instance, Paul's letter to the Romans that "... every page of the letter contains indications that Paul has very concrete and critical objections to the dominant political theology of the Roman Empire under the principate".²⁰ No one in antiquity, I surmise, could reflect upon let alone be a devotee of the imperial cult as such. Apart from the fact underscored by some of the scholars previously referred to that the imperial cult neither constituted a consistent entity nor a universal phenomenon of the Roman Empire, it is important to underline its *etic* nature. The imperial cult constitutes a second-order concept by which modern scholars try to make sense of a diversity of phenomena of the Roman Empire from the time of August and onwards. To ascribe to inhabitants of the Roman Empire a preoccupation with the imperial cult is fallacious.²¹ For the same reason, I find it rather imprecise to contend that "it was the imperial cult, not Christianity, which was the fastest-growing religion of the first century".²² This acknowledgement has some wide ramifications

20 Dieter Georgi, "God Turned Upside Down," in *Paul and the Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), 148.

21 The closest one comes to an emically founded second-order concept of the imperial cult originates almost four centuries after Augustus in the writings of Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus*, in which he argues: "[Augustus] was named Father of the Fatherland because of his mildness and granted tribunician power for life, and hence temples, priests and corporations [*collegia*] were consecrated to him, as to a god, in Rome and throughout the largest cities of all the provinces, both while he was alive and posthumously." Quoted after the translation of Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 111. Cf. his discussion of the passage, *ibid.*, 111-12.

22 Justin K. Hardin, *Galatians and the Imperial Cult: A Critical Analysis of the First-Century Social Context of Paul's Letter* (WUNT II 237; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 23. Hardin also refers to Géza Alföldy's contention that "from the time of Augustus to that of Constantine, the cult of the emperor was ... the most important type of worship." Géza Alföldy, "Subject and Ruler, Subjects and Methods: An Attempt at a Conclusion," in *Subject and Ruler: The Cult of the Ruling Power in Classical Antiquity. Papers Presented at a Conference Held at the University of Alberta on April 13-15th, 1994, to Celebrate the 65th Anniversary of Duncan Fishwick* (ed. Alastair Small; Journal of Roman Archaeology Sup 17; Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1996), 254-61, citation on p. 255.

on the subsequent debate. For instance, I think it is dubious to impute a high degree of deliberateness to possible Christian opposition towards the “imperial cult.” I am quite certain that members of the early Christ-movement were capable of considering and criticizing various aspects of what we now categorize under the umbrella term imperial cult, but it is important to keep this qualification in mind when we compare texts of the early Christ-movement with elements of the imperial cult. In their own time, Deissmann’s two cults did not constitute two parallel systems of what we with a modern concept designate “religion”.

These qualifications notwithstanding, I still find it justified to engage in a discussion with Deissmann to what extent one finds, for instance, in Paul, a deliberate grappling with – sometimes verging on explicit defiance of – particular elements pertaining to what we now refer to as the imperial cult. And if the answer is affirmative, it is incumbent upon us to pose the concomitant question what such an understanding amounts to in terms of Paul’s cultural embedment in the Roman Empire. Does Pauline engagement with the imperial cult – whatever the nature of the relationship is – necessarily exclude corresponding participation in what we traditionally refer to as Jewish contexts of thinking and practices? In other words, what are the implications for our interpretation of New Testament texts if we acknowledge that representatives of the early Christ-movement could hardly have ignored the omnipresence of the imperial cult in their daily life?

I shall explore some of these issues in light of the recent and renewed interest by New Testament scholars in the imperial cult and its relationship to texts of formative Christianity. My focus will be on questions of a taxonomical nature, since I think it is analytically imperative to assess at what level the interchange between the early Christ-movement and the imperial cult took place and, secondarily, how it may be most advantageously conceptualized. I believe Deissmann was right to point to the striking parallelism in terms of language between the imperial cult and stock vocabulary of the nascent Christ-movement such as, for instance, εὐαγγέλιον, ἐκκλησία, παρουσία, and κύριος. However, he overstated the resemblances by not satisfactorily engaging in “thick description” and by taking the language correspondences not only to the level of resembling structures of meaning but also to the level of a conscious attempt of Christ-adherents to engender a counter-language. It is a truism of contemporary philosophical discourse that language correspondences do not necessarily imply dependence in terms of historical influence, nor can they be taken to indicate sameness in terms of meaning. There is always the risk of what in the natural sciences is frequently referred to as the fallacy of the panda’s

thumb, i.e., taking superficial resemblances to constitute either identity or genealogical relationships.²³

Unlike Deissmann, who took language correspondences between the imperial cult and formative Christianity to constitute a token of the latter's deliberate attempt to set up a rivalling cult, we need to consider if convergences in language necessarily involve sameness in thinking or a claim to parallel aspirations.²⁴ Although conspicuous, recurrent similarities may also be caused by the fact that we, by virtue of our analytic focus, concentrate on discursive systems which in terms of both space and time arose in a milieu that was not essentially different. In other words, do the similarities and continuous conflations of language necessarily involve purposeful competition or should they rather be taken as indicative of belonging to what Martin Hengel used to designate a cultural and social *koinē* of the Mediterranean area during the era of the Roman Empire?²⁵ These considerations make it the more urgent to develop a set of criteria that will enable us to make such basic differentiations in an analytically informed manner.

The title of the essay – “Imperial Politics in Paul: Scholarly Phantom or Actual Textual Phenomenon?” – is not meant to suggest that the inclusion of the imperial cult as a frame of reference for contextualizing the Pauline texts is of a superfluous let alone irrelevant nature. On the contrary, I think that substantial arguments may be adduced for paying close heed to the imperial cult, its ideology, its practices, and its terminology when interpreting Pauline texts. However, I sometime have the impression that in some recent studies, particularly those stemming from the guild of New Testament scholars,²⁶ more weight is being ascribed to the relevance of the

23 Cf. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism: An Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 50.

24 Cf. Justin Meggitt, “Taking the Emperor’s Clothes Seriously: The New Testament and the Roman Emperor,” in *The Quest for Wisdom: Essays in Honour of Philip Budd* (ed. Christine E. Joynt; Cambridge: Orchard Press, 2002), 143–69, particularly 157.

25 Martin Hengel (with cooperation from Christoph Markschies), “Das Problem der ‘Hellenisierung’ Judäas im 1. Jahrhundert nach Christus,” in *Judaica et Hellenistica: Kleine Schriften I* (ed. Martin Hengel; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 82.

26 With all due respect, Richard Horsley is an example of what I have in mind. Despite some excellent contributions within the field, I think he goes much too far in not only attributing significance to the imperial cult as some sort of countercult to the nascent Christ movement but also in attributing a high degree of deliberateness to early Christians’ engagement with the imperial cult. See, for instance, Richard A. Horsley, “General Introduction,” in *Paul and the Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), 1–8; Richard A. Horsley, “Building an Alternative Society: Introduction,”

imperial cult as an appropriate context for the interpretation of Pauline texts than it actually merits. When the Pauline texts – or more appropriately as a description of an influential trajectory in current scholarship, particular passages of the texts – are taken to exhibit a deliberate engagement with or defiance of the imperial cult, I become reticent and think that cautiousness is called for.

When, for instance, Helmut Köster in an essay on “Imperial Ideology and Paul’s Eschatology in 1 Thessalonians” notes that the use of the terms εἰρήνη and ἀσφάλεια (in 1 Thess. 5:3) resume a motto of Augustan Rome (*pax et securitas*), I become reluctant.²⁷ Although I acknowledge the terminological conflation, I fail to see how analytically one can possibly warrant such a degree of intentionality on the part of an author to whom we only have textual access. As indicated above, the occurrence of similar words in different contexts should not necessarily be taken as a token of identity in terms of tradition or as representative of a direct polemic against the other tradition applying the same terminology.²⁸ After all, the two terms under discussion are not that specific in order to elicit Köster’s classification of them as counter-terms to a particular tradition. Furthermore, I think that a problematical ontological dumping pertaining to Deissmann’s framing of the question as two rivalling cults being opposed to each other lingers on, i.e., the imperial cult is taken as a religion on a par with the early Christ-movement. Needless to say, my scepticism does not detract from the relevance of contextualizing the Pauline texts in light of – among other referential frames – the imperial cult, but it does call for caution with respect to the analytical bearing assigned to this particular frame of reference.

In the remaining part of the essay, I shall focus on two related questions. First, I shall discuss the theoretical horns involved in the conceptualization of alleged resistance on the part of Paul against the Roman Empire in general and the imperial cult in particular. Second, I shall examine to what extent the early Christ-movement did, in fact, ideologically aspire to set up an anti-imperial ideology and, additionally, an anti-world that was simultaneously modelled on and subversive to Roman society but aiming to become autonomous and independent of it. In phrasing the second point,

in *ibid.*, 206-14. Similar criticism may be raised against Neil Elliott’s interpretation in “The Anti-Imperial Message of the Cross,” in the same volume, see particularly 167, 176.

27 Helmut Koester, “Imperial Ideology and Paul’s Eschatology in 1 Thessalonians,” in *Paul and the Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), 158-66, particularly 161-62.

28 Graham N. Stanton, *Jesus and the Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 35.

I do not mean to say that the various trajectories and manifestations of the early Christ-movement all related in the same manner to the imperial cult, nor do I intend to suggest that no development occurred in terms of views of the Roman Empire. I believe Deissmann was right to notice the differences between Paul and the *Apocalypse of John*, but I am uncertain about the extent to which these differences can be taken to reflect a general development in early Christianity, as Deissmann did. Other texts originating from the same period as the *Apocalypse* point in a different direction.

4. Finding a Basis for Comparing Paul with the Imperial Cult

Rather than focusing on particular terms, as Deissmann did in his comparison of the early Christ-movement with the imperial cult, I shall take a brief look at five Pauline passages. I am particularly interested in structures of meaning that we designate “apocalyptic”, since, from my perspective, they constitute what comes closest to a direct rivalry with, or perhaps even a defiance of, the imperial cult, i.e., as we understand it in modern terms as an assemblage of a variety of phenomena. The first one is *1 Corinthians* 1:18-31, which is about Christ as the power and wisdom of God. The passage is part of a larger argument that also includes the following verses (2:1-5),²⁹ but due to constraints of space, I shall limit myself to discussing the former passage only. The passage is illustrative of a founding structure of meaning that permeates all Pauline letters. The second passage to be discussed is *1 Corinthians* 2:6-8 that focuses on the true wisdom of God. Again, it is only a part of a larger argument (2:6-16) which is embedded in the macro-argument of *1 Corinthians* 1:18-4:21 as the first part of the *pistis*-section.³⁰ The next passage to discuss is *2 Corinthians* 2:14-17, which is a sort of recapitulation of the main thesis of *2 Corinthians* (found in 2 Cor. 1:12-14). The fourth passage which I proceed to analyze is *Philippians* 2:6-11, and the fifth passage to be illuminated also comes from this letter, namely *Philippians* 3:17-21. The sixth and final passage that I will analyze is *Romans* 13:1-7, which is extremely important for our topic since it has exerted considerable influence on the history of reception of the New Testament in general, and Paul in particular, with respect to the relationship between Christianity and the surrounding

29 Cf. Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (HUTH 28; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 184-86.

30 Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 207-25.

society, politics, and religion. Needless to say, I am not in a position to take up all the exegetical conundrums that pertain to these passages nor am I capable of doing full justice to them in terms of their specific position within the argument of the individual letters. Due to constraints of space, I shall concentrate on the main contours and that which has an immediate impact on our discussion of the relationship between Paul and the imperial cult.

The first passage (1 Cor. 1:18-25) constitutes the first part of Paul's first argument provided in the *pistis*-part of the letter that encompasses the main body of the letter (1:18-15:58). In the passage, Paul divides all of mankind into two basic groups.³¹ There are the Christ-believers who will be saved and a group that comprises two ethnic sub-groups, Jews and Greeks, who will perish. The taxonomic principle for this organization is of a cognitive nature.³² People are classified into the two groups on the basis of their cognitive skills. Believers have been endowed with a cognitive competence, i.e., faith which enables them to grasp that the figure of the crucified Christ is, in fact, identical with the wisdom of God. In contrast, Greeks and Jews exemplify two ethnic groups basically representing the same mode of thinking, although they are held to encapsulate two different forms of worldly thinking. Whereas Jews demand signs, Greeks seek wisdom, but both fall short by their failing ability to identify the crucified figure of Christ as the true wisdom of God. In this manner, they are representative of worldly thinking and conspicuously different from Christ-adherents, who have been bequeathed with the appropriate interpretative key: αὐτοῖς δὲ τοῖς κλητοῖς, Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἑλλήσιν, Χριστὸν θεοῦ δύναμιν καὶ θεοῦ σοφίαν (1 Cor. 1:24).

In the subsequent passage (1 Cor. 1:26-30), Paul applies the argument to the social constitution of Christ-adherents in Corinth. He has already intimated this element of social composition in the previous verses by pointing to the Christ-group as a social entity that transcends ordinary ethnic differentiations.³³ The Christ-group is composed of both Jews and Greeks, which does not make it less ethnic in the manner that Paul describes it, but it does point to a certain difference in the way they are defined. If the Christ-adherents take a closer look at their own formation, they will

31 For historical reasons, I want to retain the male-determined language not only of formative Christianity but also of the ancient world in general.

32 See Anders Klostergaard Petersen, "Wisdom as Cognition: Creating the Others in the Book of Mysteries and 1 Cor 1-2," in *The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought* (eds. Charlotte Hempel, Armin Lange, and Hermann Lichtenberger; BETL 159; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 405-32, especially 422-27.

33 See the excellent discussion in Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

see that they are representative of the same basic values that are claimed to constitute the wisdom of God. There are neither many wise according to the flesh (οὐ πολλοὶ σοφοὶ κατὰ σάρκα), nor many powerful (οὐ πολλοὶ δυνατοί), nor many born of noble birth (οὐ πολλοὶ εὐγενεῖς) in the community. In fact, just as Christ crucified has come to identify the wisdom of God, God has chosen the foolish of the world (τὰ μωρὰ τοῦ κόσμου) to shame (καταισχύνῃ) the wise (τοὺς σοφούς), and chosen the weak of the world (τὰ ἀσθενῆ τοῦ κόσμου) to shame (καταισχύνῃ) the strong (τὰ ἰσχυρά), and even more so has he chosen the lowly and despised of the world (τὰ ἀγενῆ τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὰ ἐξουθενημένα) – those who count for nothing (τὰ μὴ ὄντα) – to reduce to nothing (καταργήσῃ) those who are something (τὰ ὄντα) with the aim in mind that no flesh shall boast before him (1 Cor. 1:26-9). It was Nietzsche who sharply saw that a radical change of values is a hallmark of Pauline thinking. Traditional values of the Greco-Roman world are here uncompromisingly subverted in the creation of a new hierarchy of values that challenge the values of ordinary society. Although I think it is difficult to argue that the passage constitutes an explicit defiance of the imperial cult, one has to be tone-deaf not to acknowledge that the claims made here imply that groups of Christ-adherents constitute a community of their own with their own thinking, their own mores, and their own social practices.

This is also evident from Paul's use of the body metaphor in chapter 12 of the same letter, which indicates that Christ-adherents constitute a parallel society or a community that has been taken out of this world, an ideologically defined form of continuous liminality that will last until the final transformation of Christ-followers (1 Cor. 12:12-27). In principle, Paul could explicitly have opposed the Roman Empire by including Romanness in his taxonomic categorization of the world of those who will perish, but he did not do so, which I think is important for the assessment of the relationship between Paul and the imperial cult. In fact, I cannot think of any passage in the Pauline letters that bears witness to explicit polemics against the Roman Empire and its imperial cult. If we forget for a moment what I have already argued, namely that the category "imperial cult" constitutes a second-order concept located at the *etic* level of analysis, Paul could still have related to particular elements of what we now assign to the imperial cult. However, he does not do that in this particular passage. In addition, although it may be trite, it is important to keep in mind that the Pauline letters were written for internal use only. They were not addressed to officials of the Roman world. Only Christ-believers would know of his letters.

These qualifications notwithstanding, I think it would be an equal misunderstanding to make the inference that the imperial cult is not a

valuable frame of reference for the interpretation of the letters. The fact that Paul does not engage in a direct rhetorical assault on the Empire cannot be taken as indicative of a lack of tension in terms of claims that are being made about Christ-groups that, indeed, they constitute a counter-world and a counter-society with its own system of values and practices. Other apocalyptic passages in the Pauline letters similar to the Corinthian passage bear evidence to the fact that it is justified to see the formative Christ-movement as a parallel society and, thus, a challenge to the imperial cult, which among other important functions had the role of securing religious and social coherence throughout the Empire. I do not think Roman officials would have been pleased reading Paul's letters had they had the opportunity to do so. The last remark, however, indicates that the tension between Paul as a representative of the early Christ-movement and the imperial cult should be sought at the ideological level, i.e., that there was no direct clash between the two. However, if one scrutinizes the subject in hindsight, it is difficult to avoid the impression of an ideological collision with entailments at the practical level as well.

In the opening verses of chapter two (1 Cor. 2:1-5), Paul applies the distinctions he made (in 1 Cor. 1:18-31) to himself. His proclamation of the gospel is in full accordance with the basic structure of the wisdom of God (1:18-25) and exemplified by the social constitution of the Corinthian community (1:26-31). When Paul founded the community, he came to the Corinthians in weakness, fear, and much trembling (2:3). His speech and proclamation were not based on persuasive words of wisdom (οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας λόγοις), but on a manifestation of spirit and power (ἀλλ' ἐν ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως) (2:4) in order that the faith of the Corinthians should not be founded on the wisdom of humans but on the power of God (2:5). In the next verse (2:6), Paul resumes the categorical difference between the wisdom stemming from the realm of God and that of this world. He emphasizes how he speaks wisdom among the perfect (ἐν τοῖς τελείοις), a wisdom that is not of this aeon nor one that belongs to the rulers of this aeon, since they will be annihilated (σοφίαν δὲ οὐ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου οὐδὲ τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου τῶν καταργουμένων; 2:6). The wisdom is further characterized as something that God has hidden in a mystery and which he has preordained before the aeons for the glory of Christ-adherents, i.e., the perfect ones (2:7). The wisdom has not been recognized by the rulers of this aeon (οὐδεὶς τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου), for if they had recognized it, they would not have crucified the lord of glory (2:8).

Paul's argument is embedded in what we with a modern scholarly category designate an apocalyptic layer of tradition. This observation has sometimes

occasioned a debate on whether Paul is referring to extramundane entities by his talk about “rulers of this aeon” or to actual governing rulers. I think this discussion is misperceived by establishing a false alternative.³⁴ The one option does not exclude the other. Definitely, any Roman ruler whom we imagine to have had access to the text would hardly have been satisfied with what he found. In the context of the letter, Paul positions the “strong” group within the Corinthian community in the unpleasant position of approaching the fate of the rulers of this world. By way of inference, he has already scolded them for not being among the ideal members of the community, since God has chosen what is foolish (τὰ μωρά) in this world in order to bring shame on the wise (τοὺς σοφούς); God has chosen what is weak (τὰ ἀσθενή) in this world in order to bring shame on what is strong (τὰ ἰσχυρά) (1:27); God has chosen what is base (τὰ ἀγενή) in this world and what is despicable (τὰ ἐξουθενημένα), that which is not (τὰ μὴ ὄντα), in order to annihilate that which is (τὰ ὄντα) (1:28). As is evident from numerous passages in the subsequent argument, particularly the strong fraction of the community has caused problems for Paul in his relationship with the Corinthians.

Since Paul constructs the basic social composition of the community to be founded on the rationality of the cross (1:18-25), namely those social segments that are not among the wise according to the flesh (οὐ πολλοὶ σοφοὶ κατὰ σάρκα), not among the powerful (οὐ δυνατοί), not among those of noble birth (οὐ εὐγενεῖς) (cf. 1:26), by the same logic he positions those who conform to these criteria in an inferior position. Although from a mundane perspective, the members belonging to the strong fraction within the community conform to the wisdom of the world, they do not exhibit the wisdom of God and are, therefore, in danger of not being reckoned among the perfect (ἐν τοῖς τελείοις) to whom Paul speaks wisdom (2:6). It is indisputable that Paul is referring to superhuman powers (in 2:6-10), but it is also most likely that he reckons human governing rulers as belonging to the same entity, as the extraterrestrial antagonists need terrestrial collaborators to carry out their dirty job.

Once again, I do not think it is reasonable to argue that Paul engages in a direct assault on the imperial cult, but based on these verses it is certainly acceptable to claim that some of the elements which we understand to be included by the imperial cult are also part of Paul's castigation of the rulers of this aeon. In the heat of the argument, he most certainly subverts the values of ordinary life and especially those pertaining to

34 Cf. Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 62.

common hierarchies of social order in Roman society. Needless to say, this ideologically liminal assault on ordinary societal hierarchy determined by the rulers of this aeon entails a corresponding condemnation of the rulers of this world, for they shall be annihilated (cf. 2:6). Their primary failure lies in their failing capacity to recognize the lord of glory whom they crucified (2:8): a fact also involving the Roman authorities whom Paul holds responsible for the crucifixion and as agents of powers antagonistic to God and Christ-followers.

In the passage in 2 *Corinthians* that is of obvious interest (2 Cor. 2:14-7), Paul takes up the idea of the triumphal march which makes one immediately think of the imperial cult. It is an important part of the letter, since it rhetorically encapsulates the argument of the first two chapters. Here, however, it is Paul (possibly including his closest helpers) who is said to always be led in triumph in Christ (τῷ πάντοτε θριαμβεύοντι ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, 2:14a). There has been some discussion pertaining to the meaning of “being led in triumph”, whether it designates the status of the elevated or that of the prisoner of war being exposed in the triumphal procession. This discussion is not crucial here, since we find the same radical change of values in this passage as in the previous one. God is praised for always leading Paul in triumph in Christ and for making manifest through Paul at every place the odor of the knowledge of Christ (τὴν ὁσμὴν τῆς γνώσεως αὐτοῦ φανεροῦντι δι’ ἡμῶν ἐν παντί τόπῳ, 2:14b). Christ-followers constitute the aroma of Christ (Χριστοῦ εὐωδία ἐσμὲν, 2:15b), but it soon turns out that this aroma of Christ, in terms of olfaction, is of a strange quality.³⁵ To those who are being saved, it is the aroma of life (ὁσμὴ ἐκ ζωῆς εἰς ζωὴν), while for the group destined to perish, it is an odor of death (ὁσμὴ ἐκ θανάτου εἰς θάνατον).

In the broader context (2 Cor. 2:14-17), Paul uses his somewhat excessive metaphor to castigate those missionaries whom he sees as intruders – unfortunately, we neither know how they regarded themselves nor how they conceived of their relationship to Paul. Although at this stage of the letter, it is an indirect form of rebuke only: Paul uses it to pave the way for his subsequent direct assault on his “opponents” in chapters 10-12. At this point of the argument, he indirectly blames them by telling them what he is not: Paul and his co-operators are not like sophists who sell the word of God as mercenary good (οἱ πολλοὶ καπηλεύοντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, 2:17a). On

35 See the discussion in John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence* (SBL.DS 99; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 160-65.

the contrary, they are men of sincerity (ἀλλ' ὡς ἐξ εἰλικρινείας) who speak as from God in the sight of God before Christ (2:17b). The code pertaining to sophism is remarkably similar to passages in Plato that likewise establishes the authority of Socrates and, thereby, of Plato himself by scolding the sophists for selling philosophy for money (cf. Plato, *The Sophist* 231D and *Protagoras* 313C).

Later in the letter, Paul speaks about “carrying in the body the death of Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:10) which again blatantly takes up the metaphor of olfaction, since he presents himself to his addressees as an itinerant stench of the putrefaction of Christ’s body. Although no explicit refutation of the triumphal processes pertaining to the imperial cult is made in the passage, it is difficult to imagine that the intended audience would not interpret it within this frame of reference. Yet again, Paul does not defy the imperial cult *in toto*, but he unashamedly challenges an important aspect of what we by our modern category understand as constituting a significant element of it by making Christ the head of the divine procession, and additionally by introducing a hierarchy of olfactory values that patently stages a counter-world and a counter-system of values.

If we turn to *Philippians*, we find a similar picture. The Christ hymn (2:6–11) makes it blatantly clear that Christ-adherents make extravagant claims as to the role of Christ. In fact, the entire world should acclaim that God in recompense for Christ’s sacrificial death has greatly exalted him and gracefully bestowed on him a name that surpasses all other names (2:9). At the name of Jesus every knee should bend – those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth – and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is the κύριος, to the glory of God the father (2:10–11). Similar acclamations obviously abound in the imperial cult; but once again, I do not think that the passage can be taken as indicative of an explicit defiance against the Roman Empire and its imperial cult on the part of Paul. However, to return to Deissmann’s acute observation: any knowledgeable addressee belonging to the upper cultural and social segments of the central Mediterranean world in the first century would have had to be both blind and tone-deaf in order not to perceive the claims included in such statements. They openly counter the aspirations conveyed by the various manifestations of what we refer to as the imperial cult, namely that the emperor was lord of the world. In Paul, Christ is made the lord to the glory (εἰς δόξαν) of God the father (2:11c).

The same othering as we have seen in the Corinthian correspondence (1 Cor. 1:18–31 and 2 Cor. 2:14–17) is found in another passage of *Philippians* in which Paul enjoins his addressees to become imitators of him (Phil.

3:17-21).³⁶ Thereby they will constitute a contrast to those who conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ (τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 3:18b). The latter group is once again characterized by their failing ability in terms of cognition. They are thinking earthly things (οἱ τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονούντες) and, therefore, their God is the stomach (ὧν ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία) and their glory their own shame (καὶ ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ αἰσχύνῃ αὐτῶν), for which reason their end is destruction (3:19). In contrast, Christ-adherents have their citizenship (πολίτευμα ἡμῶν) in heaven, from where they shall await the savior Jesus Christ. Needless to say, the othering exhibited by this passage does not subscribe to the system of values of the imperial cult. On the contrary, here we also find a passage – typical of Paul's apocalyptic mode of thinking – that makes a rivalling claim to that of the imperial cult. The community of Christ-believers is not in this world. Their citizenship is of another world to which they are obliged to show their loyalty. On the basis of their fidelity, the savior Jesus Christ will transform the lowly body. Perhaps in this passage we come closer to a direct defiance of the imperial cult, since counter-claims are being made here, but it is important to notice that they are not made in direct opposition to the imperial cult.

Our final passage comes from *Romans*. From the perspective of the subsequent *Wirkungsgeschichte*, Paul's discussion on Christians' relationship to the governing authorities (Rom. 13:1-7) has been one of the most influential passages in almost all discussions of the relationship between Paul and surrounding society, Christianity, and politics. The difficulties modern New Testament scholars have had in coming to grips with the passage are evident from the opening passages of Neil Elliott's essay on "Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda", which not only highlights the diversity of opinions on the passage but also testifies to the problems exegetes find in reconciling this passage with Paul's letters in general.³⁷

36 For the importance of othering in Paul, see my article Anders Klostergaard Petersen, "Othering in Paul: A Case-Study of 2 Corinthians," in *The Faces of the Other: Religious Rivalry and Ethnic Encounters in the Ancient World* (ed. Majastina Kahlos; Cursor Mundi 10; Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 19-50. For the role of imitation in Paul and in the nascent Christ-movement, see my essay "Attaining Divine Perfection through Different Forms of Imitation," *Numen* 60 (2013): 7-38.

37 Neil Elliott, "Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda," in *Paul and the Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), 184-204, particularly 184-86. A telling example of the problems for interpreters in coming to terms with the passage is Timothy Carter, who understands the passage as not only ironically written by Paul but also ironically conceived by his audience; see T. L. Carter, "The Irony of Romans 13," *Novum Testamentum* 46 (2004): 209-28.

The passage is part of the larger paraenetic section of Romans (Rom. 12:1-15:14).³⁸ In line with the thinking we have seen in the previous passages, Paul first exhorts his predominantly gentile intended addressees to present their “bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable worship” (12:1).³⁹ They are encouraged not to conform to this aeon but to transform themselves by the renewal of their mind so that they may judge what the will of God is, what is good, acceptable, and perfect (12:2). Therefore, to many scholars it comes as a great surprise that Paul (in Rom. 13:1-7) proceeds to urge his recipients that “every person should be subject (ὑποτασσέσθω) to the governing authorities” (13:1a). He moves on to argue that there is no authority that does not rest on God and that all existing authorities (αἱ δὲ οὐσαί) have been instituted (τεταγμέναι εἰσίν) by God (v. 1b). Therefore, everyone who resists authority resists what has been appointed by God (ὁ ἀντιτασσόμενος τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ διαταγῇ ἀνθέστηκεν), and those who will resist (οἱ δὲ ἀνθεστηκότες) will incur judgement (v. 2).

This, indeed, may sound paradoxical in light of the previous passages that we have perused. However, I believe it is decisive to keep our previous findings in mind that at no place does Paul engage in frontal attack on the Roman Empire or in an assault on the imperial cult. The latter option, as I have already underlined, would have been impossible, since Paul had no knowledge of the alleged “Caesar religion”. It is also doubtful whether he had a second-order awareness of the Roman Empire constituted in terms of a religio-political entity. In addition, it is noticeable that he does not mention Rome anywhere in the passage.⁴⁰ Therefore, I think it more likely to conceive of the previous passages, in terms of ideological aspirations, as an attack on all empires and rulers of this world. This, however, neither implies armed forces against Roman imperial rule nor practical resistance at the level of the actual social world of Christ-followers. In fact, I believe that rather than confronting oneself with problems when trying to reconcile the passage

38 Cf. Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 317-23.

39 I concur with Stowers that the intended audience of *Romans* is of gentile ethnic background. This, of course, does not exclude that the Christ-believing community(ies) in Rome also comprised people of an ethnic Jewish background, but for particular reasons the intended addressees of Paul's letter were of an ethnically gentile background. For the same reason, I hold Paul's attempt to mediate between the “strong” and the “weak” in *Romans* 14 to be about a diversity of opinion represented by Paul's interpretation and a view exhibited by people of judaizing background, that is, gentiles endorsing a Christ-faith that possibly involves Sabbath-observance, observance of the circumcision, and dietary rules.

40 Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33; London: Chapman / Doubleday, 1992), 662.

Romans 13:1-7 with the remaining letters, the rest of *Romans* included, one should make this passage a point of departure for the interpretation of the Pauline letters. Of course, I acknowledge the lateness of the *Letter to the Romans*, but that does not detract from the fact that Paul may here voice a view also reverberated by his other letters. It may well be that we see a contradiction where none existed for Paul. But how is such a reading possible?

In the subsequent verses, Paul exhorts his recipients to have trust in the authorities, for “rulers are not a terror to good work but to evil” (13:3a). Christ-followers shall not be afraid of authority. For if they do good, they will incur praise from the authority (v. 3b). The authority is the servant of God for the good of Christ-adherents. Only if they do evil, they have reason to fear, since the authority does not carry sword in vain, for he is God’s servant, an avenger to execute wrath on him who commits evil (v. 4). So, Christ-followers should be subject (ὑποτάσσεσθαι) not only for the sake of wrath but also for the sake of conscience (v. 5). For the same reason, Christ-followers pay taxes, “for they are the servants of God, who are continually attending to this thing” (v. 6). Finally, Paul incites his recipients to render with fear and honor all their due taxes to him to whom tax is due (v. 7).

To understand what is at stake, we need to pay heed to the surrounding verses. In fact, the passage in question constitutes a bridge between the previous chapter (Rom. 12) and the following discussion on how to fulfil the law through love (Rom. 13:8-14), since Paul wavers between the theme of how to behave towards outsiders and members of the in-group. In verse 12:17, he proceeds to discuss the relationship between members of the Christ-group and those belonging to the outside world. He encourages Christ-followers of Rome to repay no one evil for evil but to have regard of good things (καλά) before all men (πάντων ἀνθρώπων). Members of the Christ-community should live peaceably (εἰρηνεύοντες) with all men (πάντων ἀνθρώπων) (12:18b). They should not be overcome by evil but are exhorted to overcome evil with good (ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ; 12:20). The same theme is resumed in verse 13:8, where Paul urges his addressees to owe nothing to anybody but to love each other, since he who loves the other has fulfilled the law. All commandments are fulfilled in the one commandment that they shall love their neighbor as themselves (13:9b). But what has this to do with the matter of taxation? Quite a bit, I shall argue.

As it has been pointed out by Peter Bang, “taxation represented the quintessence of imperial subjection”,⁴¹ of which we are also reminded in the famous aphorism attributed to Jesus “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Matt. 22:21, cf. Luke 23:2). In light of this, it is reasonable to argue that Paul’s exhortation to Christ-adherents to subject to the governing authorities by rendering taxes is indicative of his encouragement in the previous verses to have regard of good things before all men, and to live peacefully with all men. In verse 13:3, we saw him emphatically state that rulers are not a terror to the good thing but to evil (τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἔργῳ ἀλλὰ τῷ κακῷ). Christ-adherents have no reason to fear authority; in so far as they do good (τὸ ἀγαθόν), they will receive praise from it (13:3b-c). In fact, it is God’s servant for the good (εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν) of Christ-followers (13:4a). The payment of taxes is an indexical token of Christ-followers’ acknowledgement of this.

In light of this argument, the Pauline understanding of the epoch-marking significance of Christ’s death and subsequent vindication in his resurrection does not have concrete revolutionary implications. Far from seeing this as contradictory to his other statements, one should acknowledge that Paul proclaims peace with the surrounding society at the concrete social level. Only at the ideological level does he inculcate on his addressees a sense of belonging to the celestial realm characterized by a citizenship conspicuously different from the citizenship of this world (cf. Phil. 3:21). His Roman recipients should not conform with this aeon but be transformed by the renewing of the mind in order for them to prove what is the will of God, the good, the acceptable, and the perfect (Rom. 12:2). Among the good things is the support of the governing authorities that is indexically expressed in the payment of taxes.

In sum, what I am arguing is basically a reversal in terms of the time-honored manner of interpreting the impact of Paul’s apocalyptic passages. Rather than having them determine the overall interpretation of the paraenetic sections, one should, I suggest, reverse the relationship so that the paraenetic sections are used as a lens through which the actual, social impact of the apocalyptic passages should be understood. If this sounds slightly enigmatic, I am willing to partly concede it; but if one begins to think about it in terms of *Romans* 13:1-7, I believe the argument becomes lucid. In this manner, the *Romans* passage constitutes neither a conundrum nor a self-contradiction on Paul’s part. On the contrary, it makes perfect sense, that is, if one ethically acknowledges the difference between the ideological level and the concrete, social one – a difference, needless to say, not recognized by Paul.

41 Peter Fibiger Bang, “Imperial Ecumene and Polyethnicity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies* (eds. Alessandro Barchiesi and Walter Scheidel; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 675.

5. Conclusion

Brief as this evidence may be, it does give us a basis for answering my two interrelated questions. First, what are the horns involved in the conceptualization of alleged resistance on the part of Paul against the Roman Empire in general and the imperial cult in particular? Second, to what extent did the early Christ-movement – here exemplified by Paul – ideologically aspire to set up an anti-imperial ideology and, additionally, a counter-world simultaneously modelled on and subversive to, and yet aspiring to be autonomous and independent of Roman society and its imperial cult?

I have deliberately chosen to focus on apocalyptic passages in order to make it palpably clear that the discussion of the relationship between the Pauline letters and the imperial cult does not preclude a corresponding emphasis on other cultural and intellectual frames of references. In fact, the two frames of references illuminated in my examples have been used to shed light on each other. Second, I have refrained from making assured statements as to any direct historical relationship between Paul and the imperial cult. I am for various reasons sceptical about the extent to which one may in fact point to a straightforward historical relationship between structures of meaning, ideology, practices, and terminology pertaining to the imperial cult and that of the Pauline letters. This is compliant with my previous rejoinder that the relationship between what we now designate the imperial cult and the Pauline letters is of an asymmetrical nature. Third, although it is unlikely that in Paul we find an explicit and *totaliter et aliter* defiance of the imperial cult, I think it is fair to say that his recipients and, presumably, Paul too would have been more than tone-deaf were they not able to conceive of his gospel in terms of a counter-world with counter-claims being made against what we now term the imperial cult.

Ultimately, I do not think it is accurate to claim that early Christ-adherents ideologically attempted to create an anti-imperial ideology. It just happened that this was, in fact, what they accomplished. However, we also need to bear in mind – and this is, indeed, an important finding – that what took place at the ideological level was never in Paul's letters taken to the level of concrete social practice. On the contrary, I suggest that we take Paul's exhortations of *Romans* 13:1-7 as indicative of what he also aimed to say in his apocalyptic arguments. This may sound rather self-contradictory to us, but it need not have done so to Paul if one bears in mind that we are making these finer and subtler differentiations at an etic level of analysis. Yes, Paul did argue that the true citizenship of Christ-adherents is located in the celestial realm. Yes, he did endorse the view that Christ-followers

should not conform to the standards of this aeon. However, that did not include deliberate revolt against the surrounding society in general and the Roman Empire and the imperial cult in particular.

On the contrary, by paying heed to the remarkably new standards of conforming to God's law bequeathed upon them in the Christ-event and made concrete for individual followers in their baptism, Christ-adherents had, by means of the spirit, been endowed with the option to be perfect citizens in God's citizenship and in the citizenship of the emperor. In fact, according to Paul this was the only actual, possible outcome of being Christ-adherents. To the extent that one accomplishes the Law of God, one also accomplishes the laws of the world, but the presupposition for this is that, paradoxical as it may sound, Christ-followers are no longer in this world, but have been cognitively transposed to the realm of God.

So are imperial politics in Paul ultimately a scholarly phantom or an actual textual phenomenon? I think it is the latter in terms of intellectual consequences, but it is only in hindsight that we may lucidly see it as such. In this regard, I think Deissmann was right when he endorsed the view that

man muß doch nicht denken, Paulus und seine Glaubensgenossen seien mit geschlossenen Augen durch die Welt gegangen, unberührt von dem, was damals in den großen Städten die Gemüter bewegte...

But this contention does not imply an explicit stance on that which we now designate the imperial culture.

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Das Markusevangelium – eine ideologie- und imperiumskritische Schrift?

Ein Blick in die Auslegungsgeschichte

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1. Einleitung

Seit mittlerweile gut zwanzig Jahren, verstärkt aber in der vergangenen Dekade, hat eine ideologie- und imperiumskritische Markuslektüre das Interesse der Exegetinnen und Exegeten an dem ältesten Evangelium in eine neue Richtung gelenkt. Imperiumskritik meint dieser Auslegungsrichtung zufolge die Kritik an der religiösen Selbstverabsolutierung und dem politischen Gebaren des Imperium Romanum; der demgegenüber weitere Begriff der Ideologiekritik schließt auch die Kritik an der Orientierung an der Hochschätzung des Reichtums sowie am System von Ehre und Schande mit ein.

Als Textelemente, die einer imperiumskritischen Markuslektüre zugänglich sind, gelten bei Gerd Theißen, Martin Ebner und Warren Carter der Begriff *εὐαγγέλιον*,¹ bei Klaus Wengst und Michael Bünker das Schlusswort Jesu in der Perikope von der Kaisersteuer (Mk 12,13–17),² bei Volker Küster die Zeichnung des *ὄχλος*,³ bei Hermann Waetjen die Charakterisierung der

1 Gerd Theißen, *Lokalkolorit und Zeitgeschichte in den Evangelien. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (NTOA 8; Fribourg [CH]: Academic Press / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 31992), 270–284; Martin Ebner, „Evangelium contra Evangelium. Das Markusevangelium und der Aufstieg der Flavii“, *BN* 116 (2003): 28–42; Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2006), 17; Martin Ebner, „Das Markusevangelium und der Aufstieg der Flavii. Eine politische Lektüre des ältesten ‚Evangeliums‘“, *BiKi* 66 (2011): 64–69.

2 Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana. Anspruch und Wirklichkeit. Erfahrungen und Wahrnehmungen des Friedens bei Jesus und im Urchristentum* (München: Kaiser, 1986), 78–80; Michael Bünker, „Gebt dem Kaiser, was des Kaisers ist! – Aber: Was ist des Kaisers? Überlegungen zur Perikope von der Kaisersteuer“, *Kairos* 29 (1987): 85–98, hier 95.

3 Volker Küster, *Jesus und das Volk im Markusevangelium. Ein Beitrag zum interkulturellen Gespräch in der Exegese* (BThSt 28; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996), 93–94.

Dämonen,⁴ bei Warren Carter vor allem der Dämon „Legion“ (Mk 5,9),⁵ bei Matthias Klinghardt die in der gleichen Erzählung erwähnten Schweine (Mk 5,13),⁶ die Charakterisierung einiger menschlicher Akteure bei Stefan Lücking und bei Hisako Kinukawa,⁷ die Zuweisung des Gottessohntitels an den Gekreuzigten bei Eckhard Reinmut und Martin Ebner,⁸ der Verweis auf die Entrückung Jesu in Mk 16,6 bei Martin Ebner,⁹ die Wunder Jesu bei Silvia Schroer und Thomas Staubli,¹⁰ die Heilung der kranken Frau (Mk

4 Herman C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power. A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), xiii. Für Waetjen waren insgesamt eigene Erfahrungen mit Kolonialismus und Postkolonialismus in Kenia, Südafrika und Zimbabwe ausschlaggebend (xiv).

5 Carter, *Roman Empire*, 17. Zu dem Vers Mk 5,13 verweist er darauf, dass das Wappentier der an der Zerstörung Jerusalems beteiligten Legio X Fretensis eben das Schwein war. „The scene shows Jesus' power over Rome and the latter's destruction ... declares God's judgment on Rome's imperial order“ (17–18). In seinem Artikel „Die Legio X Fretensis und der Besessene von Gerasa. Anmerkungen zur Zahlenangabe ‚ungefähr Zweitausend‘ (Mk 5,13)“, *Bib.* 88 (2007): 351–64, erklärt Markus Lau die Zahl 2000, die zu keiner Zeit der römischen Militärgeschichte die fixe Sollstärke einer Legion darstellt, auf dem Hintergrund von Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 2. 499–506, demzufolge Cestius die ganze 12. Legion, von den anderen in Syrien stationierten Legionen jedoch je 2000 zu einer militärischen Operation mitnahm, die zur Plünderung einiger Städte führte, aber für 2000 Besatzungssoldaten mit dem Tod durch Überfall seitens der Juden endete (359). Weitere terminologische Parallelen zwischen römischer militärischen Vokabular und Mk 5,1–20 benennt Lau, „Legio X Fretensis“, 353.

6 Matthias Klinghardt, „Legionsschweine in Gerasa. Lokalkolorit und historischer Hintergrund von Mk 5,1–20“, *ZNW* 98 (2007): 28–48, zufolge sind die Ortsangaben „Gerasa“ und „See Genezareth“ keineswegs unsinnig. In Gerasa ist römische Präsenz zum Zweck der Sicherung der Handelswege im südlichen Syrien belegt, vor allem für die Zeit um 80 n. Chr., wie dort zeitweise auch eine Vexillation der Legio X Fretensis stationiert gewesen sein mag (42); die ertrinkenden Schweine karikieren deren Selbstverständnis, sich auch im Wasser siegreich zu behaupten (dieser Selbstanspruch wird durch zahlreiche maritime Symbole auf Selbstdarstellungen dieser Legion belegt; 40–41); dass die Gerasener Jesus bitten, das Gebiet zu verlassen, verweist darauf, dass römische Präsenz nicht nur soziale Störungen, sondern auch (wenngleich nicht für den Geheilten) ökonomische Vorteile bringen konnte (43).

7 Stefan Lücking, *Mimesis der Verachteten. Eine Studie zur Erzählweise von Mk 14,1–11* (SBS 152, Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1993); Hisako Kinukawa, *Frauen im Markusevangelium. Eine japanische Lektüre* (Luzern: Edition Exodus, 1995).

8 Eckart Reinmuth, *Anthropologie im Neuen Testament* (UTB 2768; Tübingen/Basel: Francke 2006), 84–85, zuvor schon Ebner, „Evangelium“, 34–35, der die Tatsache, dass in Mk 15,39 der bestimmte Artikel fehlt, als „ungeheuerer Aufwertung Jesu“ (35) zu würdigen weiß, die noch „in der Phase der schwankenden Anerkennung Vespasians als neuem ‚Sohn Gottes‘“ (a.a.O.) erfolgt.

9 Martin Ebner, „Mensch wird Gott. Der Kaiserkult und die christlichen Gemeinden“, *Welt und Umwelt der Bibel* 25 (2002): 36–45, hier 40.

10 Silvia Schroer/Thomas Staubli, *Die Körpersymbolik der Bibel* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 150.

5,25–34) bei Thea Vogt,¹¹ die Zebedaidenfrage bei Jürgen Roloff, Eckart Reinmuth und Stefan Schreiber,¹² die Blindenheilung (Mk 10,46–52) bei Martin Ebner,¹³ die Verfluchung des Feigenbaums (Mk 11,12–14) bei Warren Carter,¹⁴ die Salbung Jesu (Mk 14,3–9) bei Monika Fander,¹⁵ die urchristlichen Rituale Taufe und Abendmahl bei Martin Ebner und Christian Strecker,¹⁶ allgemein die Anthropologie bei Carsten Jochum-Bortfeld,¹⁷ die Christologie bei Adam Winn.¹⁸

Die neue Auslegungsrichtung hat noch kaum Eingang in die Kommentare gefunden. Vorbehalte und alternative Deutungen sind angemeldet worden: In Mk 5,9 meint der Name „Legion“ lediglich die große Zahl und ist mit Hinweis auf die Analogien *Testament Salomos* 11,3–7¹⁹ oder Horaz, *Oden* 1.3.30 („Kohorte von Fieberdämonen“)²⁰ unpolitisch erklärt worden – wichtiger sei dem Evangelisten die kultische Reinheit nichtisraelitischer Gebiete;²¹

11 Thea Vogt, *Angst und Identität im Marksevangeliem. Ein textpsychologischer und sozialgeschichtlicher Beitrag* (NTOA 26; Fribourg [CH]: Academic Press / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 135–141.

12 Jürgen Roloff, *Die Kirche im Neuen Testament* (NTD.E 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 95 (mit Verweis auf die Analogie in Gal 3,28); Reinmuth, *Anthropologie*, 83; Stefan Schreiber, „Caesar oder Gott“, *BZ* 48 (2004): 64–85, hier 82–83.

13 Ebner, „Evangelium“, 39–40.

14 Carter, *Roman Empire*, 50, zufolge legt der Kontext von Mk 11,12–14 nahe, den Feigenbaum auf die städtische Elite Jerusalems mit ihrer Kontrolle über den Tempel zu deuten. Dass er zwar Blätter, aber keine Frucht trägt, symbolisiert nach Carter, dass Gottes Leben spendender Segen nicht mehr auf diesem System ruht, das einem Großteil der Bevölkerung so viel Elend bereitet hat.

15 Monika Fander, „Das Evangelium nach Markus“, in *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung*, (hg. Luise Schottroff und Marie-Theres Wacker; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998), 499–512, hier 508.

16 Christian Strecker, „Macht – Tod – Leben – Körper. Koordinaten einer Verortung der frühchristlichen Rituale Taufe und Abendmahl“, in *Erkennen und Erleben. Beiträge zur psychologischen Erforschung des frühen Christentums* (hg. Gerd Theißen und Petra von Gemünden; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 133–153, mit eindrucksvoller Kontrastierung von Mk 6,30–44; 14,12–26 mit Mk 6,17–29.

17 Carsten Jochum-Bortfeld, *Die Verachteten stehen auf: Widersprüche und Gegenentwürfe des Markusevangeliums zu den Menschbildern seiner Zeit* (BWANT 178; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008).

18 Adam Winn, *The Purpose of Mark's Gospel. An Early Christian Response to Roman Imperial Propaganda* (WUNT II/245; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

19 Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 255.

20 M. Eugene Boring, *Mark. A Commentary* (The New Testament Library; Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 151.

21 Boring, *Mark*, 151; C. Clifton Black, *Mark* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011), 136–37.

dass Herrschaft Dienst bedeutet, ist im Judentum wie im Griechentum als Gedanke da, also keine neue christliche Errungenschaft.²²

2. Grundsätzlich hermeneutische Erwägungen

Exegese vollzieht sich nicht im luftleeren Raum. Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft muss sich heute mehr denn nach ihrer gesamtgesellschaftlichen Relevanz fragen lassen. Unmittelbar einsichtig ist, dass die hier vorgestellte Auslegungsrichtung weniger die affirmative²³ als vielmehr die prophetisch-kritische Funktion²⁴ von Religion in der Gesellschaft zur Geltung bringen kann. Damit ist aber auch gegeben, dass in die eigene Stellungnahme zu dieser Interpretationsrichtung immer auch der eigene politische Standpunkt wenigstens unbewusst mit einwirkt, dass man also von sich selbst abstrahieren muss, wenn man fragt, ob diese Auslegungsrichtung in historischer wie theologischer Perspektive dem Markusevangelium angemessen ist.

Man muss sich der veränderten Rahmenbedingungen heutiger imperiumskritischer Markuslektüre bewusst sein. In westlichen Ländern zeitigt Ideologiekritik für ihre Vertreter im Allgemeinen keine politischen Konsequenzen; es besteht Meinungsfreiheit. Das traf für antike Christinnen und Christen nicht ohne weiteres zu. Allerdings ist zu beachten, dass die Wandlung des offiziellen politischen Urteils z.B. über Klientelkönige wie Herodes Antipas auch einen gewissen Freiraum eröffnen konnte. Dieser war, weil er den Königstitel begehrte, wie ihn der damalige Privatmann Agrippa I. bereits trug, bei Caligula 39 n. Chr. in Ungnade gefallen; so musste eine Darstellung wie in Mk 6,14–29, ca. 30 Jahre danach geschrieben, für ihren Verfasser keine negativen Konsequenzen haben.

22 Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 499, mit Verweis auf Moshe Weinfeld, „The King as the Servant of the People: The Source of the Idea,“ *JJS* 33 (1982): 189–194, der auf 1 Kön 12,7 rekurriert, und auf David Seeley, „Rulership and Service in Mark 10:41–45,“ *NT* 35 (1993): 234–50, der auf die hellenistisch-philosophische Diskussion um rechte Königsherrschaft aufmerksam macht.

23 Wilhelm Gräb, „Religion in der Moderne,“ in *Religion – Metaphysik(kritik) – Theologie im Kontext der Moderne / Postmoderne* (hg. Markus Knapp and Theo Kobusch; TBT 112; Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2001), 104–12, hier 104–09.

24 Thomas Ruster, *Der verwechselbare Gott. Theologie nach der Entflechtung von Christentum und Religion* (QD 181; Freiburg: Herder, 2000), 191, 198, 204 u.ö., legitimiert Kapitalismuskritik vom biblischen Grundgebot des Monotheismus her.

3. Beobachtungen zur Methode

Drei Textzugänge sind in dieser Auslegungsrichtung von Bedeutung, die Beschreibung semantischer Felder, die Adaption sozialgeschichtlicher Modelle und Grundannahmen und die Entdeckung intratextueller Verknüpfungen.

Die Beschreibung semantischer Felder meint den Aufweis, dass dieselben tragenden Begriffe im Evangelium wie in der römischen Herrschaftsideologie begegnen. Je mehr semantische Felder sich überschneiden, desto größer ist die Möglichkeit, dass Texte des Markusevangeliums als herrschaftskritisch verstanden werden konnten.

Eine Adaption sozialgeschichtlicher Modelle ist u.a. bei Stefan Schreiber zu beobachten. Er adaptiert das Modell des amerikanischen Soziologen James C. Scott, der in seinem Buch *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* das ‚public transcript‘ und das ‚hidden transcript‘ unterscheidet. Ersteres enthält die Äußerungen des Untergeordneten in Gegenwart des Höherstehenden, letzteres enthält das, was der Untergeordnete eigentlich denkt.²⁵ Für Mk 12,17 bedeutet das: Als ‚public transcript‘ gelesen stellt es das Imperium nicht in Frage: „Was dem Imperium zusteht und was den Göttern, ist identisch.“²⁶ Ein kritischer Ton kommt nur durch den Singular „Gott“ hinein, den die Hörer natürlich auf den Gott Israels beziehen. Die Königsherrschaft Gottes setzt aber ihre Gegenwart.

Intratextuelle Verknüpfungen sind z.B. für Martin Ebner wesentlich. Die Königstitulatur für Herodes Antipas ist historisch falsch; hält man jedoch dagegen, dass im Markusevangelium ansonsten nur Jesus als König tituliert wird, bekommt sie einen kritischen Sinn. Der eine König lässt Menschen dahinschlachten, der andere gibt sich selbst in den Tod.²⁷ Dem Festmahl bei Herodes Antipas werden von Ebner das letzte Abendmahl ebenso wie die Mahlgemeinschaften Jesu kontrastiert. Ebner kontrastiert die Gemeinschaft derer, die am Fest der ungesäuerten Brote teilhaben, mit der Gemeinschaft derer, vor denen Jesus warnt (Mk 8,15), dem Sauerteig des Herodes (6,14–29). „Im Spiegelbild des Herodes-Symposiums wird in den Jesus-Symposien die etablierte Sozialpyramide durcheinander gebracht. Statt sich und seine ‚retainer‘ bedienen zu lassen, spannt Jesus seine Schüler als Kellner für

²⁵ Schreiber, „Caesar oder Gott,“ 70.

²⁶ Schreiber, „Caesar oder Gott,“ 80–81.

²⁷ Martin Ebner, „Die Etablierung einer ‚anderen‘ Tafelrunde. Der ‚Einsetzungsbericht‘ in Mk 14,22–24 mit Markus gegen den Strich gelesen“ in *Paradigmen auf dem Prüfstand. Exegese wider den Strich. Festschrift für Karlheinz Müller zu seiner Emeritierung* (Hg. Martin Ebner und Bernhard Heininger; NTA.NF 47; Münster: Aschendorff, 2004), 17–45, hier 30.

die Volksmassen ein“ (also derer, die beim Gastmahl des Herodes gar nicht dabei sind).²⁸

Als weiteren methodischen Weg schlage ich den Einbezug der Rezeptions- und Auslegungsgeschichte der entsprechenden Texte vor, doch warum? Mir geht es um die Frage, ob sich die vermuteten ideologiekritischen Lektürevorgänge für die ersten Jahrhunderte des Christentums auch real nachweisen lassen; mein Interesse ist ein historisches Interesse. Wenn der Nachweis, wie im Folgenden deutlich wird, keineswegs lückenlos gelingt, bedeutet das nach dem eben Ausgeführten noch keine grundsätzliche Infragestellung dieser Interpretationslinie. Neue Zeiten können neue Richtungen des Denkens erfordern; die Wirkungsgeschichte lässt den mit ihr Beschäftigten auch auf nicht verwirklichte Sinnpotentiale des Textes stoßen, und auf dem Recht zum Experiment muss die Wissenschaft bestehen, wenn sie Wissenschaft bleiben will. Eher ist in dem nur unvollkommen zu führenden Nachweis ideologiekritischer Lektürevorgänge die Aufgabe impliziert, den Wandel von einem vermuteten ideologiekritischen zu einem unpolitischen Christentum ebenfalls historisch wie sozialgeschichtlich zu beschreiben.

Was sich historisch eruieren lässt und was ich im folgenden vorführen will, ist zum einen die antike Christentumskritik, zum anderen das Ausmaß tatsächlich gelebter ideologie- und imperiumskritischer Praxis von Christinnen und Christen, zum dritten die Rezeptions- und Auslegungsgeschichte einiger Partien.

4. Der historische Rahmen: antike Christentumskritik und christliches Handeln

Das Christentum in der Wahrnehmung antiker Christentumskritik

Für die Fragestellung dieses Beitrages sind vor allem folgende Vorwürfe von Belang:

1. Christinnen und Christen untergraben die Ordnung,²⁹ von ihnen geht die Gefahr eines Umsturzes aus.³⁰ Ist das Christentum als Bekehrungsreligion, so vollzieht sich Selbstdefinition des Individuums über eine partikulare Gruppe, nicht über die Zugehörigkeit zum Imperium

²⁸ Martin Ebner, „Etablierung,“ 23. 29.

²⁹ So die Widerspiegelung bei Justin, *1 Apologie* 12 (PTS 38:48).

³⁰ So Kelsos, bei Origenes, *Contra Celsum* 3.14 (GCS 2:212), vgl. die Widerspiegelung bei Tertullian, *Apogeticum*. 38.1 (CC.SL 1:149).

Romanum.³¹ Das konnte verdächtig werden, wenn von dieser Gruppe Unruhe ausging. Bekanntlich waren die Christen nicht die ersten, deren Kult von Einschränkungen seitens der römischen Staatsmacht betroffen war.³²

2. Christinnen und Christen verehrten nicht die allgemein anerkannten Götter.³³ Diese Weigerung wurde als Infragestellung der inneren Einheit des Imperium Romanum empfunden,³⁴ dessen Wohlfahrt man an die richtige Verehrung der richtigen Gottheiten gebunden sah. Wenn Plinius der Jüngere und Trajan von „unseren Göttern“ sprechen,³⁵ Lukian von Samosata von „den hellenischen Göttern“,³⁶ kommt das Bewusstsein einer letzten Einheit des in sich vielgliedrigen griechisch-römischen Pantheons gegenüber fremden Gottheiten zum Ausdruck.
3. Christinnen und Christen weigern sich, beim Glück des Kaisers zu schwören.³⁷ Kelsos empfindet das als eine Gefahr für die Einheit des Imperium Romanum, das allein verhindert, dass die Herrschaft den wildesten Barbaren zufällt.³⁸ Er berücksichtigt nicht, dass die Christen nicht die einzigen Kritiker am Kaiserkult waren.³⁹ Gerade Stoiker im ersten nachchristlichen Jahrhundert hatten als prominente Kritiker römischer Kaiser vielfach zu leiden.⁴⁰ Doch haben stoische und christliche

31 John A. North, *Roman Religion* (Greece & Rome. New Surveys in the Classics 30; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 66–67.

32 Vgl. Tacitus, *Annales* 2.85 u.a.

33 So die Widerspiegelung in *Martyrium Polycarpi* 12.2 (Lindemann/Paulsen, 272), sowie bei Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum* 3 (CC.SL 3 A:36).

34 Das lassen Origenes, *Contra Celsum* 3.15 (GCS 2:214), und Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum* 3 (CC.SL 3 A:36), erkennen.

35 Plinius, *Epistulae* 10.96,5; 97.1.

36 Lukian von Samosata, *De morte Peregrini* 13.

37 So Kelsos, bei Origenes, *Contra Celsum* 8.68 (GCS 3:284).

38 Kelsos, bei Origenes, *Contra Celsum* 8.68 (GCS 3:284).

39 Der römische Stoiker Lucanus formuliert in einem Hexameter (*Pharsalia* 7.449): inque deum (= deorum) templis iurabit Roma per umbras („Und in Tempeln der Götter, da schwört Roma den Eid bei den Schatten“; Schatten = Tote).

40 Philosophisch begründete Ideologiekritik nahm man bei einigen Stoikern des 1. Jh. n.Chr. wahr, die denn auch persönliche Folgen zu tragen hatten: Seneca wurde zur Selbsttötung gezwungen (Tacitus, *Annales* 15.62.1), Musonius Rufus nach Gyaros verbannt, die Stoiker Barea Soranus und Thrasea Paetus begingen Selbstmord. Helvidius Priscus, Thraseas Schwiegersohn, wurde von Vespasian ins Exil geschickt und später dort ermordet (zu ihm vgl. Epiktet, *Dissertationes* 1.2.19). Im Jahr 71 vertrieb Vespasian mit Ausnahme des 69 wieder zurückgekehrten Musonius Rufus alle Philosophen aus Rom, weil ihre Leben „nicht immer den Zeiten angemessen waren“ und sie „ihre Hörer auf subtile Weise verderben“ (Dio Cassius 66.13.1). Domitian verbannte wiederum Philosophen aus Rom und brachte andere um, die den genannten Barea Soranus und

Kritik am Kaiserkult genauso wenig zusammengefasst wie die Kritik an Domitian bei Tacitus und bei christlichen Autoren.

Albrecht Dihle zufolge haben die Christen die Forderung, „durch Teilnahme an den Handlungen des Kaiserkultes ihre Loyalität gegenüber der Staatsordnung zu bekunden ... gleichsam ernster genommen, als sie gemeint ist.“⁴¹ Was den Christen bei ihrer Ablehnung des Kaiserkultes verborgen blieb, war die Funktion als Loyalitätsbekundung und Gunsterweis einerseits,⁴² die Bedeutung der Apotheose im politischen Diskurs andererseits. Mit der Divinisierung verstorbener Kaiser waren ja normative Erwartungen an seinen Nachfolger impliziert, der sich diese Divinisierung erst durch Wohlverhalten verdienen musste.⁴³

Ideologiekritische Praxis von Christinnen und Christen?

Trotz Aussagen wie Gal 3,28 gingen vom Christentum kaum emanzipatorische Wirkungen aus.

Die Möglichkeiten von Frauen in der Gemeindeleitung wurden bekanntlich zunehmend eingeschränkt. Klaus Thraede⁴⁴ weist nach, dass so genannte großkirchliche Autoren zumeist extrem konservative Positionen vertraten, während Frauen in später als deviant empfundenen Gruppen diesbezüglich mehr Möglichkeiten hatten.⁴⁵ Man kann freilich fragen: Ist die Zurückdrängung leitender Funktionen von Frauen in Texten wie den

Thrasea Paetus allzu deutlich posthum ihre Anerkennung signalisiert hatten. Friedo Ricken, *Philosophen der Antike*, Bd. 2 (Urban Taschenbücher 459; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1996), 185.

41 Albrecht Dihle, „Die Sendung des Iudaeus Theophilus,“ in *Politeia und Res Publica. Beiträge zum Verständnis von Politik, Recht und Staat in der Antike. Dem Andenken Rudolf Starks gewidmet* (Hg. Peter Steinmetz; Palingenesia 4; Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1969), 330–36, hier 334.

42 Simon R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power. The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 62–67.

43 Matthias Poppel, „Gott oder Mensch? Kaiserverehrung und Herrschaftskontrolle,“ in *Die Praxis der Herrscherverehrung in Rom und seine Provinzen* (Hg. Hubert Cancik und Konrad Hitzl; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 69–95, 70.

44 K. Thraede, „Frau,“ *RAC* 8 (1972): 197–269, hier 238–43.

45 Vgl. die Erwähnungen von Prophetinnen bei den Montanisten bei Eusebius von Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiae* 4,27; 5,16,9 (GCS 9/1:388.462–64) u.ö., die Erwähnungen von Apostelinnen in der *Sophia Jesu Christi* NHC III,4, p. 112 par. BG 3, p. 114, die Erwähnung der Philumene bei Tertullian, *Praescriptione haereticorum* 30,6 (CC.SL 1:211). Auch eine gnostische Lehrerin Marcellina ist bekannt. Zu erwähnen ist ferner die Stellung der Frau als Offenbarungsempfängerin, so u.a. Maria Magdalena (*Evangelium nach Maria*); Hypsiphron (*Hypsiphron*, NHC XI,4), Rede einer Gottheit Bronte (*Vollkommener Verstand*, NHC VI,2). Ute E. Eisen, *Amtsträgerinnen im frühen Christentum. Epigraphische und literarische Studien* (FKDG 61; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck &

Pastoralbriefen dem Umstand geschuldet, dass der männlichen „Kultgotttheit“ Jesus keine Frau als Priesterin dienen sollte?⁴⁶

Auch zum Verhältnis zwischen Sklaven und Freien wurde von christlichen Autoren der Frühzeit keine Strukturdebatte geführt; Humanisierung innerhalb der bestehenden Strukturen war möglicherweise zu erleben, weil sich sonst der zahlenmäßige Erfolg des Christentums unter den Unterschichten nicht erklären würde, die in der Gemeinde Jesu eine neue Heimat gefunden haben.⁴⁷

Reichtumskritik wurde nicht von allen gleichermaßen vollzogen; hier war ideologiekritische Praxis für manche weniger Befreiung als Zumutung.⁴⁸ Paulus und der Hirt des Hermas klagen über Separationstendenzen seitens der Reichen, Jakobus, Polykarp und der unbekannte Verfasser der *Taten des Petrus und der zwölf Apostel* müssen dazu mahnen, Bessergestellte in der Gemeinde nicht zu privilegieren.⁴⁹ Strenge innerchristliche Regeln konnten das Engagement von Reichen in der Gemeinde verhindern;⁵⁰ der geforderte Reichtums-⁵¹ und Statusverzicht⁵² hat wohl auch zu Konversionen weg vom Christentum geführt.

Wohl ab der dritten oder vierten Generation ist auch ein tendenzielles soziales Auseinanderdriften zu beobachten. Das Bildungsniveau

Ruprecht, 1996), zeigt allerdings einen nicht zu unterschätzenden Anteil der Rolle von Frauen auch in der Großkirche auf. Mehrere Grabinschriften für Diakoninnen etc. sind belegt.

46 Priesterinnen sind in der griechisch-römischen Umwelt im Kult nicht von Göttern, sondern von Göttinnen tätig.

47 Vgl. dazu Peter Pilhofer, „Die ökonomische Attraktivität christlicher Gemeinden,“ in ders., *Die frühen Christen und ihre Welt. Greifswalder Aufsätze 1996–2001. Mit Beiträgen von Jens Börstinghaus und Eva Ebel* (WUNT 145; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 194–211, hier 205–11.

48 Dabei war die christliche Gemeinde auf die Anwesenheit einiger finanziell Bessergestellter angewiesen: 1. Sie hatte in der Frühzeit keine eigenen Versammlungsräume; 2. Materielle Unterstützung der Armen war nicht nur theoretische Forderung, sondern wurde auch vollzogen (vgl. als testimonium externum Lukian von Samosata, *De morte Peregrini* 12.13), setzt aber Besitz voraus (Clemens von Alexandria, *Quis dives salvetur* 13.1 [GCS 17²: 167–68]).

49 1 Kor 11,17–34; Jak 2,1–13; *Hermas Vision* 3.6.5; 3.14.5; *Epistula Polycarpi* 6 (Lindemann/Paulsen, 248); *Die Taten des Petrus und der zwölf Apostel* (NHC VI,1), 11–12.

50 Peter Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten zwei Jahrhunderten. Eine sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (WUNT II 18; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 188.

51 Ignatius *Smyrner* 6,2 (Lindemann/Paulsen, 228–230); Herm. *Sim.* 8.9. 1–3; 8.75.1–3; 9.20.3; 9.97.3 (GCS 48:74.92–93); vgl. *Die Taten des Petrus und der zwölf Apostel* (NHC VI,1), 11,26–12.4.

52 *Hermas Similitudo* 8.9.1–3/75.1–3 (GCS 48:74); vgl. e negativo Tertullian, *De idololatria* 17.1–3 (CC.SL 2:117–18); Cyprian, *Ad Donatum* 3 (CC.SL 3 A:4).

bestimmter später als deviant geltender Gruppen⁵³ und Einzelpersonen⁵⁴ ließ diese gerade für gebildete und reiche Christen attraktiv erscheinen. Einige Jahrhunderte später galt es immer wieder, in einer mittlerweile offiziell christlichen Gesellschaft Fehlverhalten von Christen hinsichtlich des Reichtums kritisch zu benennen. Johannes Chrysostomus und Salvian von Marseille stehen für diese Tendenz.⁵⁵

Auch die selbst gewählte Ehelosigkeit, wie sie etwa in den Apostelakten sichtbar wird, konnte ideologiekritisch verstanden werden, z.B. durch Virginia Burrus: Die Frau entzieht sich damit der Befehlsgewalt eines Ehemannes.⁵⁶ Doch hat das Anne Jensen jüngst bestritten.⁵⁷ Ihrer Meinung nach sind asketische, nicht emanzipatorische Ideale leitend. Askese ist erst einmal Ausdruck der Weltdistanz, aber unter dem Aspekt des Verzichtens um Christi willen, nicht unter dem Aspekt der Freiheit.

53 Vgl. die Aufnahme von Joh 1, Platon und der Genesis in *Tractatus Tripartitus* (NHC I,5), 96; die Widerlegung von Hesiod, *Theogonie* 116.133, in *Vom Ursprung der Welt* (NHC II,5), 97,24–98,11, die Homerzitate in *Die Erzählung über die Seele* (NHC II,6), 136,27–137,5; vgl. ferner die Definitionen des Glaubens mit Hilfe stoischer Erkenntnistheorie bei Basilides, *Fragment 2* (hg. Winrich Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule. Eine Studie zur Theologie und Kirchengeschichte des zweiten Jahrhunderts* [WUNT 83; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996]). Vgl. ferner die antignostische Kritik des Porphyrius, *Vita Plotini* 16: Die Gnostiker „täuschten viele und wurden selbst getäuscht, so als wäre Platon nicht in die Tiefe der intelligiblen Substanz eingedrungen. Daher hat Plotin viele Widerlegungen in den Lehrveranstaltungen vorgebracht und auch ein Buch geschrieben, welchem ich den Titel ‚Gegen die Gnostiker‘ gab. Er überließ es uns, das übrige der Kritik zu unterziehen.“

54 Basilides und Valentinus waren vermutlich ihren großkirchlichen Konkurrenten in Alexandria intellektuell weit überlegen. Florinus, der von Eusebius von Caesarea der Hinneigung zu Valentinus bezichtigt wird, soll laut Irenaeus „eine glänzende Stellung am kaiserlichen Hofe“ gehabt haben (Eusebius von Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiae* 5.20.5); der Schuster Theodot und seine Gesinnungsgenossen beschäftigten sich laut Eusebius von Caesarea eher mit den Schriften von Euklid, Aristoteles und Theophrast als mit der Heiligen Schrift (Eusebius von Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiae* 5.28.14).

55 Für Salvian von Marseille vgl. u.a. (!) *De gubernatione Dei* 4.4.20–21 (SC 220:246–248). Johannes Chrysostomus hatte um seiner Kritik am höfischen Luxus willen Anfeindungen bis hin zur Exilierung zu ertragen.

56 Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy* (Studies in Women and Religion 23; Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1987).

57 Anne Jensen, „Die Theklageschichte. Die Apostolin zwischen Fiktion und Realität,“ in *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung* (hg. Luise Schottroff, Marie-Theres Wacker; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998), 742–747, hier 746.

Imperiumskritische Praxis von Christinnen und Christen?

Einerseits finden wir immer ein in unseren Augen politikfreies Verständnis des Reiches Gottes. Hegesipp berichtet von der Vorladung von Herrenverwandten durch Domitian u.a.:

Als man sie über Christus und über die Art, den Ort und die Zeit seines Reiches fragte, antworteten sie, dasselbe sei nicht von dieser Welt und dieser Erde, es sei vielmehr ein himmlisches Reich, das erst am Ende der Welt kommen werde, wenn Christus in Herrlichkeit erscheinen wird, um die Lebenden und die Toten zu richten und jedem nach seiner Gesinnung zu vergelten. Daraufhin verurteilte sie Domitian nicht, sondern verachtete sie als gemeine Leute.⁵⁸

Dieses unpolitische Verständnis des kommenden Reiches⁵⁹ ermöglichte eine weitgehende Integration von Christinnen und Christen in die Gesellschaft. Christen nahmen für sich in Anspruch, die besten Stützen der Herrschaft zu sein,⁶⁰ die größten Wohltäter des Vaterlandes.⁶¹ Für Meliton von Sardes ist der Zeitpunkt der Geburt Christi unter Augustus nicht ohne Sinn:

Dass unsere Lehre zugleich mit dem Reich, das glücklich begonnen hatte, zu dessen Wohl erblühte, ergibt sich daraus, dass ihm von den Zeiten des Augustus an nichts Schlimmes widerfahren ist, dass es im Gegenteil – wie es aller Wunsch ist – lauter Glanz und Ruhm gewonnen hat.⁶²

Hier wirkt wohl immer noch die von Augustus selbst geförderte Epochen-gliederung nach – früher die Republik mit Bürgerkrieg, seit seinem Prinzipat die innere Befriedung des römischen Reiches. Denn selbst Tertullian, der mehr als einmal gegen Christenverfolgungen Protest erhoben hat, kann in seiner vormontanistischen Zeit das römische Reich als diejenige Größe benennen, die die Schrecken der Endzeit aufhält, „die wir alle nicht zu erleben wünschen.“⁶³ Selbst der Dienst christlicher Soldaten im römischen

58 Hegesipp, bei Euseb, *Historia ecclesiae* 3.20.1–6 (GCS 9/1:232–234).

59 Vgl. noch 2 Clemensbrief 5.5–6; 19.4 (Lindemann/Paulsen 158.172); Justin, 1 *Apologie* 11.2 (PTS 38:47).

60 Justin, 1 *Apologie* 12.1 (PTS 38:48).

61 Origenes, *Contra Celsum* 8.74 (GCS 3:291).

62 Meliton von Sardes, bei Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiae* 4.26.8 (GCS 9/1:384–386).

63 Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 32.1 (CC.SL 1:142–43).

Heer konnte wie selbstverständlich bejaht werden,⁶⁴ und die Präsenz christlicher Soldaten ist seit der Mitte des 3. Jh. auch inschriftlich bezeugt.⁶⁵

Trotzdem ist teilweise in denselben Schriften auch das Gefühl der Welt-distanz zu konstatieren, wie allein schon das häufige Paroikia-Motiv zeigt.⁶⁶ Politische Loyalität und Welt-distanz sind in wünschenswerter Deutlichkeit im so genannten *Diognetbrief* nebeneinandergestellt:⁶⁷

Auf Erden weilen sie (scil. die Christen), aber im Himmel haben sie Bürgerrecht. Sie gehorchen den erlassenen Gesetzen, und mit der ihr eigenen Lebensweise überbieten sie die Gesetze.

Mit ebensolcher Klarheit sind bei Tertullian politische Loyalität und theologische Distanz gegenüber den religiösen Ansprüchen des Imperium Romanum ins Verhältnis gesetzt. Tertullian kann dieses Nebeneinander in beide Richtungen lenken. In der *Apologie* meint er, den Kaiser nicht als Gott anzuerkennen, bedeute nicht, dass man ihm gegenüber nicht loyal ist.⁶⁸ In seiner etwas später geschriebenen *Schrift an Scapula* schreibt der Nordafrikaner:

64 Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 5.6 (CC.SL 1:96); Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiae* 5.5.1 (GCS 9/1:434); vgl. dazu Hanns-Christoph Brennecke, „An fidelis ad militiam converti possit? [Tertullian, *De idololatria* 19,1] Frühchristliches Bekenntnis und Militär im Widerspruch?“, in *Die Weltlichkeit des Glaubens in der Alten Kirche*, Festschrift für Ulrich Wickert zum siebzigsten Geburtstag (hg. Dietmar Wyrwa; BZNW 85; Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 45–100, hier 57–61. Die bekannte Kritik des Kelsos, Christen sollten sich für den Kaiser auch militärisch engagieren (bei Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.73) zielt wohl auf die Übernahme höherer Führungsstellen (Brennecke, „An fidelis“, 63–64). Die Häufung von Soldatenmartyrien zu Beginn des 4. Jh. hängt damit zusammen, dass der Kaiserkult in der Tetrarchie eine neue Bedeutung erlangt hatte (Brennecke, „An fidelis“, 74–77). Selbst für Tertullian, *De idololatria* 19.1–3 (CC.SL 2:1120) ist das Problem des Soldatenstandes weniger im Verbot des Tötens als vielmehr in der Problematik der Berührung mit nichtchristlichen Kulthandlungen gegeben (Brennecke, „An fidelis“, 83–84).

65 Wolfgang Wischmeyer, *Von Golgatha zum Ponte Molle. Studien zur Sozialgeschichte der Kirche im dritten Jahrhundert* (FKDG 49; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 37.

66 1 Pet 1,17; 1 *Clemensbrief* Prooem. (Lindemann/Paulsen, 80); *Epistula Polycarpi* Prooem. (Lindemann/Paulsen, 244); 2 *Clemensbrief* 5.1, (Lindemann/Paulsen, 158); noch deutlicher Hermas *Similitudo* 1.50.1 (GCS 48:46): ἐπὶ ξενῆς κατοικεῖτε ὑμεῖς οἱ δοῦλοι τοῦ θεοῦ – am Beginn der Gleichnisse!; vgl. dazu Reinhard Feldmeier, *Die Christen als Fremde. Die Metapher der Fremde in der Antiken Welt, im Urchristentum und im 1. Petrusbrief* (WUNT 64; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992).

67 *Diognetbrief* 5.9–10 (Lindemann/Paulsen, 312).

68 Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 33.1–2 (CC.SL 1:143) – Schon Theophilus von Antiochia hatte formuliert: „Ich ehre nicht dadurch, indem ich ihn anbete, sondern dadurch, daß ich für ihn bete“ (Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* 1.11.1 [PTS 44:30]). Ähnlich äußert sich Dionysios von Alexandria, *Epistulae* 10.5 (PG 10:1321b).

Die Christen sind niemandes Feinde, am wenigsten des Kaisers. Da sie wissen, dass derselbe von ihrem Gott eingesetzt ist, so müssen sie ihn notwendig lieben, fürchten, ehren und seine Erhaltung wünschen mit der des gesamten römischen Reiches, solange die Welt steht. ... Wir verehren daher den Kaiser, aber auf eine Weise, wie sie uns erlaubt ist und ihm selbst nützt, als einen Menschen, der nach Gott der zweite ist, der, was er hat, von Gott erhalten hat und nur Gott nachsteht. ... Daher bringen wir denn auch für das Wohl des Kaisers Opfer dar, aber nur unserem Gott, der auch der seinige ist, und zwar, so wie es Gott vorgeschrieben hat, mit bloßem Gebet.⁶⁹

Zuvor sucht er, das Ansinnen der Opferforderung an die Christen als unsinnig zu erweisen, wenn doch Opfer aus reiner Gesinnung dargebracht werden wollen, und spricht von einem menschlichen Recht auf Religionsfreiheit:⁷⁰

... humani iuris et naturalis potestatis est uniuersae quod putauerit colere; nec alii obest aut prodest alterius religio.

Es ist ein Menschenrecht und eine Sache natürlicher Freiheit für jeden, das zu verehren, was er für gut hält, und die Gottesverehrung des einen bringt dem anderen weder Schaden noch Nutzen.

Man bedauert allerdings, dass Christen zu solchen Gedanken nur fähig waren, wenn ihre eigene Gruppe von der Religionsgesetzgebung benachteiligt war.

Imperiumskritische Äußerungen werden vor allem dann laut, wenn die Christen zur Verehrung der griechisch-römischen Götter bzw. zum Schwur bei der Glücksgöttin des jeweils regierenden Kaisers gezwungen werden sollen, also in der Situation des Martyriums. Diese Äußerungen können verschieden gelagert sein. Entweder wird der Unterschied zwischen den irdischen und damit sterblichen Machthabern und Gott betont⁷¹ und zwischen Verehrung und Anbetung bzw. Furcht unterschieden⁷² oder aber

69 Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* 2.6–8 (CC.SL 2:1128).

70 Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* 2.2 (CC.SL 2:1127).

71 Statius Quadratus ist Konsul, während Jesus Christus in Ewigkeit herrscht (*Martyrium Policarpi* 21.1 [Lindemann/Paulsen, 282]; *Martyrium des Apollonius* 37 [Musurillo, 100]). Apollonius will nicht bei der Glücksgöttin des Kaisers schwören – er will überhaupt nicht schwören, vgl. Mt 5,37 – sondern für den Kaiser zu dem allein seienden Gott beten (*Martyrium des Apollonius* 6 [Musurillo, 92]).

72 *Martyrium Scillitanarum acta* 9; *Martyrium des Apollonius* 37 (Musurillo, 88. 100).

die moralische Qualität der sterblichen Herrscher in Zweifel gezogen⁷³ oder aber weltliche Herrschaft als Lebensziel überhaupt hinterfragt.⁷⁴ Auf das Glück eines Menschen zu schwören entbehrt, so Origenes, jeder sicheren Grundlage,⁷⁵ und wenn der Statthalter zur Götzenverehrung aufruft, handelt in Wahrheit der Teufel.⁷⁶

Romkritische Stimmen werden dann um die Wende zum dritten Jahrhundert auch jenseits der Situation des Martyriums laut: Tertullian zufolge ist Rom weniger durch seine Religiosität gewachsen, sondern durch Verletzung der Religion, und hat umgekehrt die Religion der unterworfenen Völker durch Anwachsen verletzt.⁷⁷

Der Gang der Kirchengeschichte im 4. Jh. stellt natürlich die Frage, ob die so genannte Konstantinische Wende eine veränderte Sichtweise auf das Imperium Romanum gebracht habe. Die zunehmende Privilegierung des Christentums durch Konstantin der Große entspricht zunächst der Tradition römischen Kaisertums, die durchaus die Auswahl einer Leitgottheit kannte.⁷⁸ Allerdings trug der häufige Wechsel der jeweiligen kaiserlichen Position im trinitarischen Streit des 4. Jh. wesentlich zur Heftigkeit der berüchtigten Streitigkeiten dieser Zeit bei.⁷⁹ Imperiumskritische Toleranz forderte man nur für sich selbst, gewährte man aber anderen religiösen Gruppierungen nicht. Firmicus Maternus fordert, u.a. mit Rückgriff auf Dtn 13,6–10.12–18, die Kaiser dazu auf, die Untat des Götzendienstes mit aller Strenge zu verfolgen.⁸⁰ Ambrosius, der immerhin dem Kaiser Theodosius die Kommunion verweigert hatte, solange er nicht für das Blutbad in

73 Vgl. den Vorwurf, das Urteil mache der Wahrheitsliebe des Kaisers keine Ehre (Justin, 2 *Apologie* 2.17 [PTS 38:139]), sowie das Motiv, dass man von schlechten Königen zum ewigen, guten König wandert, ebenfalls bei Justin (Justin, 2 *Apologie* 2.19 [PTS 38:139]).

74 Ignatius *Römer* 6,1 (Lindemann/Paulsen, 214), fordert die römischen Christinnen und Christen auf, ihn nicht am Martyrium zu hindern: „Es ist besser für mich, auf Christus Jesus hin zu sterben, als König zu sein über die Enden der Erde.“

75 Origenes, *Exhortatio ad Martyrium* 7 (GCS 2:8).

76 Origenes, *Exhortatio ad Martyrium* 32 (GCS 2:28).

77 Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 25.17 (CC.SL.1:138): *aut laedendo creuerunt aut crescendo laeserunt*. Auch Minucius Felix meint in seinem ansonsten irenischen Dialog, Rom verdanke seine Größe nicht seiner Frömmigkeit, sondern seinem verbrecherischen Imperialismus. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 25.1–7 (Kytzler 142–144).

78 Gunther Gottlieb, „Tradition und Neuerung in der Religionspolitik Kaiser Konstantins des Großen“, in *Christen und Heiden in Staat und Gesellschaft des zweiten bis vierten Jahrhunderts. Gedanken und Thesen zu einem schwierigen Verhältnis* (hg. Gunther Gottlieb, Pedro Barceló; München: Vögel, 1992), 87–101.

79 Sie blieb auch den Nichtchristen nicht verborgen, vgl. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* 22.5.3–4.

80 Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanarum religionum* 29.1, Turcan 152–154.

Thessaloniki öffentlich Buße getan habe,⁸¹ erhebt Einspruch, als Theodosius einen Landfriedensbruch strafen will, bei dem der Ortsbischof von Callinicum die Synagoge hatte in Brand setzen lassen:

Soll dem Unglauben der Juden ein Platz geschaffen werden auf Kosten der Kirche? ... Soll das dank der Gnade Christi für Christen erworbene Erbe den Schatz der Ungläubigen vermehren? ... Sollen die Juden diese Inschrift an der Stirnseite ihrer Synagoge anbringen: Der Tempel der Ungerechtigkeit, errichtet aus der den Christen abgenommenen Beute?⁸²

Am 24.8.410 waren die Westgoten unter Alarich in Rom eingedrungen und hatten drei Tage lang alles geplündert und niedergebrannt. Das war für Nichtchristen wie für Christen ein Trauma. *Roma aeterna? Roma aeterna christiana?* Nichtchristen erhoben nunmehr Anklage. So lange Rom den alten Göttern ergeben war und ihnen opferte, war dies nie passiert. Nunmehr, seit der Einführung des Christentums als Staatsreligion, geschah dies Unglück binnen so kurzer Zeit.⁸³ Was sollten die Christen antworten, die doch gleichermaßen die unmittelbare Bindung der *salus publica* an ihren Gott verkündigt hatten?

Gerade nach Nordafrika wandten sich viele Flüchtlinge, die vor den Barbaren wenigstens ihr Leben zu schützen suchten. So war Augustinus unmittelbar mit den Folgen der Katastrophe konfrontiert. In mehreren Predigten der Jahre 410 und 411⁸⁴ relativierte er das Ausmaß der Ereignisse, stellt dem Glauben an die Ewigkeit Roms die Vergänglichkeit aller irdischen Dinge, auch politischer Gebilde entgegen und lehnt jeglichen heidnischen wie christlichen Rom-Mythos ab.⁸⁵ In seinen 22 Büchern „über den Gottesstaat“ (412–26) führt er diese neue Linie weiter: Die verbreitete Identifikation von Christentum und weltlich-politischer Realität wird aufgegeben, der christliche Glaube von der Verkettung mit dem Schicksal Roms

81 Ambrosius, *Epistula* (Maur.) 51.6, 13, 17 (CSEL 82/3:214–218), mit dem Schlusssatz: Wenn du glaubst, so folge mir ... Glaubst du aber nicht, so verzeih mir, was ich tue – ich aber muss Gott (vor dem Kaiser) den Vorzug geben.

82 Ambrosius, *Epistula* 74 (Maur. 40).10 (CSEL 82/3:60–61)

83 Vgl. Augustinus, *Sermo* 296.9, 7 (PL 38:1356–57); Salvian, *De gubernatione Dei* 7.1 (SC 220:430).

84 Augustinus, *Sermo* 81.9 (PL 38:505–06); *Sermo* 105.1–2 (PL 38:623–625); *Sermo* 296.7, 9 (PL 38:1356–57).

85 Hierin brach er mit der von ihm bis 405 noch vertretenen Auffassung, die eigene Zeitgeschichte sei ein Teil der Heilsgeschichte, „insofern die Christianisierung des Imperiums und die staatliche Unterdrückung des Paganismus die Erfüllung der alttestamentlichen Prophetien bedeutete.“ Michael Fiedrowicz, *Apologie im frühen Christentum. Die Kontroverse um den Wahrheitsanspruch in der ersten Jahrhunderten* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000), 139.

gelöst, die römische Geschichte entsakralisiert. Mit der Reichstheologie des Eusebius von Caesarea war gebrochen.

Bei dem deutschamerikanischen Philosophen Vittorio Hösle zeigt sich, wie diese Weltdistanz auch in heutiger Außenwahrnehmung der Kirchengeschichte die Philosophiegeschichtsschreibung beeinflusst. Das Christentum, so Hösle, hat die Kluft zwischen Moral und Politik vertieft; es

hat durch den Gedanken der Gotteskindschaft aller Menschen den universalistischen und individualistischen Idealen des Hellenismus eine sowohl weitere als auch existentiell tiefere Verbreitung geschaffen und damit die Möglichkeit einer vollen Identifikation mit einem jeden Staate beseitigt, der nicht alle Menschen umfaßt und nicht den Prinzipien des Christentums entsprechend konstruiert ist. Daran ändern auch alle Appelle zum Gehorsam gegenüber der staatlichen Autorität nichts, die sich vom Römerbrief an finden: Der entscheidende Punkt, den die Kritiker sehr genau empfunden haben, ist, daß dieser Gehorsam nur ein äußerer ist, hinter dem sich eine unendliche innere Distanz verbirgt, die langsam, aber sicher das Lebensmark des Staates verzehrt.⁸⁶

Hösle verweist zur Stützung seiner These u.a. auf mehrere Passagen bei Augustinus. Berühmt geworden ist der Satz aus *De civitate dei*: „Was sind Staaten, wenn ihnen Gerechtigkeit fehlt, anders als große Räuberbanden?“⁸⁷ Die hier gemeinte fehlende Gerechtigkeit ist, wie der vorangehende Kontext zeigt, nicht die Gerechtigkeit eines Systems, sondern die persönliche Gerechtigkeit der herrschenden Individuen.⁸⁸ Etwas weiter in Richtung Systemkritik führt Augustins Satz, das Imperium Romanum habe nie der Definition Scipios entsprochen, der gemäß der Begriff „Volk“ eine durch Rechtsübereinkunft und Interessengemeinschaft vereinigte Menschenmenge sei: Tatsächlich kamen nur die Interessen der jeweils Herrschenden zu ihrem Recht.⁸⁹

86 Vittorio Hösle, *Moral und Politik: Grundlagen einer Politischen Ethik für das 21. Jahrhundert* (München: Beck, 1997), 47–48.

87 Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* 4.4 (CC.SL 47:101).

88 Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* 4.3 (CC.SL 47:101).

89 Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* 19.21 (CC.SL 48:687–88). Auch eine gewisse Distanz zum Institut der Sklaverei zeigt sich bei Augustin: Sie ist Ergebnis der Sünde; ursprünglich sei die Herrschaft von Menschen nicht über Menschen, sondern über die vernunftlosen Wesen intendiert gewesen (Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* 19.15 [CC.SL 48:682]). Zu Augustins politischer Ethik vgl. allgemein Christoph Horn, „Augustinus über politische Ethik und legitime Staatsgewalt,“ in *Die christlich-philosophischen Diskurse der Spätantike: Texte, Personen, Institutionen. Akten der Tagung*

Man wird bedauern, dass nicht mehr an imperiumskritischen Äußerungen seitens christlicher Autoren vorliegt. Mindestens aus Gründen der Gerechtigkeit wird man jedoch fragen müssen, ob es überhaupt einen nichtchristlichen systemkritischen Diskurs gab, an dem sich die Christen hätten beteiligen können. Was in der Spätantike gegenüber Kaisern an Kritik philosophischerseits geäußert wird, scheint wiederum eher die persönliche moralische Qualifikation der Kaiser zu berühren als die Frage, ob nicht statt dem Prinzipat auch andere Herrschaftsformen denkbar wären.⁹⁰ Tertullian spottet über Kyniker die trotz ihrer Beschimpfungen gegen Kaiser eher mit Ehrenstatuen und Geldzahlungen belohnt als zu den Tieren verurteilt werden.⁹¹

5. Die Auslegungsgeschichte einiger markanter Texte

Es ist aufgrund der altkirchlichen Sicht der so genannten Einleitungsfragen klar, dass vor allem die Kommentare zu den Matthäusparallelen der im Folgenden zu verhandelnden Markus-Texte Berücksichtigung finden müssen.

Die Enthauptung des Täufers (Mk 6,14–29)

Origenes rühmt an dem Täufer den prophetischen Freimut;⁹² Hieronymus hält Antipas Willkür vor: Seinen Vater und seine Mutter hätte er wohl kaum wegen seines Schwures hinrichten lassen!⁹³ Das Gastmahl des Herodes gilt Hieronymus als *luxuriosum et impurum*.⁹⁴ Ambrosius zufolge hätten selbst „alle Barbaren“ davor zurückgeschauert, während eines Gastmahls

vom 22.–25. Februar 2006 am Zentrum für Antike und Moderne der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg (hg. Therese Fuhrer; Stuttgart: Steiner, 2008), 123–142.

90 Mittelplatoniker und Neuplatoniker haben zwar die Staatsdialoge Platons kommentiert, waren aber nicht an Platons Staatstheorie interessiert, sondern an seiner Ethik, Naturphilosophie und Metaphysik. Vgl. Heinrich Dörrie & Matthias Baltes, *Der Platonismus im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert nach Christus, Bausteine 73–100; Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (Der Platonismus in der Antike 3; Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1993), 209.

91 Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 46.4 (CC.SL 1:160–61).

92 Origenes, *Homiliae in Lucam* 27.3 (SC 87:346).

93 Hieronymus, *Commentarii in Matthaeum* 14.7 (SC 242:300); Beda Venerabilis, *In Marci evangelium expositio* 2 (CC.SL 120:508). Im Matthäuskommentar des Hilarius von Poitiers finden wir nichts Passendes zum Thema.

94 Hieronymus, *Commentarii in Matthaeum* 14.9 (SC 242:300).

einen solchen Hinrichtungsbefehl zu geben.⁹⁵ Meineide sind erträglicher als Eide von Tyrannen.⁹⁶ Andernorts betont der Kirchenlehrer: Weil die einen nicht genug bekommen, müssen die anderen ihr Leben lassen.⁹⁷ Caesarius von Arles geißelt die *luxuria*, die *pravitas* und die *lascivia*, die stets einen Hang zur Grausamkeit hat,⁹⁸ und mahnt, ähnlich wie Johannes nicht die Wahrheit zugunsten von Schmeichelei zu verkaufen.⁹⁹ Johannes Chrysostomus bezeichnet das Gastmahl als satanisches Theater mit Trunkenheit und Aufreizung männlicher Geilheit.¹⁰⁰ Das wird dann in der Mahnung an die anwesenden Gemeindeglieder paränetisch gewendet. Tanz gilt ihm als unsittlich, und so kommentiert er die öffentlichen Tänze anlässlich der Aufstellung eines Standbildes der Kaiserin Eudoxia im Jahr 403 wie folgt: Wieder einmal rast Herodias, wiederum tanzt sie, wiederum bemüht sie sich, das Haupt des Johannes auf der Schüssel davonzutragen.¹⁰¹ Beda Venerabilis zufolge wird vom Geburtstagsmahl in der Bibel nur bei dem Pharao (Gen 40,20) und bei Herodes Antipas erzählt. Die größere Untat beging Herodes Antipas, weil er den heiligen und unschuldigen Lehrer der Wahrheit hat hinrichten lassen.¹⁰² Euthymius Zigabenus bezeichnet das Gastmahl als befleckt und als viehisch.¹⁰³ Theophanes Cerameos zufolge war Herodes, der zuviel Wein getrunken hatte, den denkenden Menschen nur noch lächerlich.¹⁰⁴ In allen diesen Auslegungen interessiert die Tatsache, dass Herodes Antipas Herrscher war und nur bestimmte Menschen eingeladen hatte, nicht weiter.

Gelegentlich sind aber auch herrschaftskritische Töne zu hören. Dass übertriebener Luxus bei den meisten Königen üblich ist, wenn gefeiert wird, hält Ambrosius fest.¹⁰⁵ Lucifer von Cagliari warnt in seiner Streitschrift *De*

95 Ambrosius, *De virginitate* 3.6.26 (FC 81:316). Allerdings gibt es Parallelen in der paganen Literatur, vgl. Cicero, *Cato* 12,42; Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 2.9.3; Plutarch, *Cato Maior*. 17.1–5; *Flamininus* 18.4–10.

96 Ambrosius, *De virginitate* 3.6.28 (FC 81:318).

97 Ambrosius, *De Nabuthe Iezraelita* 5/20 (CSEL 32/2:477–78).

98 Caesarius von Arles, *Sermo* 218.3 (CC.SL 104:865).

99 Caesarius von Arles, *Sermo* 217.3 (CC.SL 104:862).

100 Johannes Chrysostomus, *Homilia in evangelium Matthaei* 48.3 (PG 58:490).

101 Nach Sozomenos, *Historia ecclesiastica* 8.20.3 (FC 73/4:1020). Auch Theognostos, *Thesaurus* 2.10 (CC.SG 5:11), thematisiert explizit den verderblichen Einfluss mancher Frauen. Gelegentlich wird die Stelle antijüdisch verwendet: Die Juden hätten den Täufer umgebracht, weil er auf Christus verwies, so (Ps.-)Cyprian, *Adversus Iudaeos* 2 (CSEL 3/3: 135).

102 Beda Venerabilis, *In Marci evangelium expositio* 2 (CC.SL 120:508).

103 Euthymius Zigabenus, *Expositio in Matthaum* (PG 129:428b).

104 Theophanes Cerameus, *Homilia* 46 (PG 132:1065ab).

105 Ambrosius, *In psalmum XXXV enarratio* 13 (CSEL 64:59): natalis erat Herodis, quam luxu nimio, ut plerisque regibus mos est, celebrare consueverat.

non parcendo in Deum delinquentibus den regierenden Kaiser Constantius II, es nicht Herodes Antipas gleich zu tun, die Orthodoxen zu verfolgen und damit das eigene Seelenheil aufs Spiel zu setzen.¹⁰⁶ Theophylakt von Ochrid moniert zum Paralleltext bei Matthäus (Mt 14,1–12) den tyrannischen Lebenswandel und die Tatsache, dass sich die Herrschenden zu wenig mit denen befassen, die durch Tugend leuchten.¹⁰⁷

Den Vergleich der beiden „Könige“ im Markusevangelium habe ich in altkirchlicher Literatur nicht gefunden, aber das hat mit hermeneutischen Vorentscheidungen zu tun, die in altkirchlicher Bibelauslegung grundsätzlich anders ausfallen als in historisch-kritischer Exegese, so dass es auch *en detail* unzulässig ist, aus der Fehlanzeige der Alten Kirche neuere Auslegungen dieser Art falsifizieren zu wollen. In der Reformationszeit werden kritische Töne gegen den politischen Herrschenden laut, wie die von Joachim Gnllka beigebrachten Beispiele von Calvin und Luther zeigen.¹⁰⁸

Vom Herrschen und Dienen (Mk 10,35–45)

Origenes hält in seiner Auslegung der Matthäusparallele fest: Die Machthaber suchen die von ihnen Unterworfenen nicht nur zu beherrschen, sondern gewaltsam zu unterdrücken. Unter denen, die ein Amt in der Kirche ausüben, soll es nicht so sein. Von ihnen ist *μετρίότης* und *ταπεινότης* gefordert.¹⁰⁹ Man soll Christus nachahmen!¹¹⁰ Gleichmaßen fragt in den Pseudo-Klementinen „Petrus“, der sich auf Missionsreise begibt, den von ihm vorgeschlagenen neuen Gemeindeleiter Zachäus, der sich gegen das ihm angetragene Amt zu wehren versucht, einschärfend u.a.:

Und erkennst du nicht deutlich genug, dass du nicht wie die Regenten der Völker zu herrschen hast, sondern als ein Knecht, der ihnen dient, wie ein Vater ... wie ein Arzt, der sich nach ihnen umsieht, wie ein Hirt, der sie bewacht – zusammenfassend sage ich, wie einer der in allem um ihr Heil besorgt ist?¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Lucifer von Cagliari, *De non parcendo in Deum delinquentibus* 18 (CC.SL 8:229–10).

¹⁰⁷ Theophylakt von Ochrid, *Enarratio in Evangelium S. Matthaei* (PG 123:293cd).

¹⁰⁸ Joachim Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, Bd. 1 (EKK II/1; Zürich: Benziger/Neukirchen-Vlun: Neukirchener Verlag u.a. 1986), 253.

¹⁰⁹ Origenes, *Commentaria in Evangelium secundum Matthaeum* 16.8 (GCS 40:492–93).

¹¹⁰ Origenes, *Commentaria in Evangelium secundum Matthaeum* 16.8 (GCS 40:497).

¹¹¹ Pseudo-Clementis, *Homiliae*. 3.64.3 (GCS 42²:80).

Der Paralleltext bei Matthäus (Mt 20,28) wird wiederum als Ansporn zur Nachahmung Christi im Umgang mit den christlichen Geschwistern wahrgenommen.¹¹²

Unpolitisch ist der Verweis auf die *humilitas* bei Hilarius von Poitiers, Hieronymus und Beda Venerabilis.¹¹³ Wenn allerdings die *humilitas* als neue Kaisertugend propagiert wird, bekommt das Denken über den Kaiser auch eine politische Dimension.¹¹⁴ Bemerkenswert ist die Auslegung bei Johannes Chrysostomus, der immer wieder durch Luxuskritik den Unwillen des regierenden christlichen Kaiserhauses auf sich gezogen hatte. Nach der ersten Stelle zu trachten, so der Kirchenlehrer, ist eine tyrannische Leidenschaft und lastet oft auch auf großen Männern. Man muss dieser Neigung deshalb auch schärfer zu Leibe gehen. Daher erfolgt der Vergleich mit den Heiden, um den Jüngern tiefer in die Seele zu greifen,¹¹⁵ um anzudeuten, wie schimpflich und abscheulich ein solches Streben sei.¹¹⁶ Das genannte Streben als *τυραννικόν ... πάθος* zu bezeichnen, demaskiert es, mit den Augen eines antiken Gebildeten gelesen, deutlich als unphilosophisch, es wie Theophylakt von Ochrid als *τῶν ἐθνικῶν ... πάθος* zu bezeichnen,¹¹⁷ zugleich als unchristlich. Euthymius spricht in diesem Zusammenhang von Christus als einem Gesetzgeber, der seinen Jüngern ein von den Nichtchristen Heiden unterschiedenes Verhalten zur Pflicht macht: *Ἐγὼ δὲ νομοθετῶ ὑμῖν*.¹¹⁸

Die Frage nach der kaiserlichen Steuer (Mk 12,13–17)

Die Wirkungsgeschichte dieser Stelle bzw. der Matthäusparallele (Mt 22,15–22) beginnt schon recht früh, nämlich im koptischen *Thomasevangelium*¹¹⁹ sowie bei Justin. Bleibt das *Thomasevangelium* unpolitisch, so ist eine

112 Pseudo-Clementis, *Recognitiones* 7.7.5 (GCS 51:200).

113 Hilarius von Poitiers, *Commentarii in Matthaum* 20.12 (SC 258:118); Hieronymus, *Commentarii in Matthaum* 20,25 (SC 259:96); Beda Venerabilis, *In Marci evangelium expositio* 3 (CC.SL 120:566).

114 Hartmut Leppin, „Zum politischen Denken des Ambrosius. Das Kaisertum als pastorales Problem,“ in *Die christlich-philosophischen Diskurse der Spätantike: Texte, Personen, Institutionen. Akten der Tagung vom 22.–25. Februar 2006 am Zentrum für Antike und Moderne der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg* (hg. Therese Fuhrer; Stuttgart: Steiner, 2008), 33–49, hier 43–44.

115 Johannes Chrysostomus, *Homilia in evangelium Matthaei* 65.4 (PG 58:622).

116 Johannes Chrysostomus, *Homilia in evangelium Matthaei* 65.5 (PG 58:623).

117 Theophylakt von Ochrid, *Enarratio in Evangelium S. Matthaei* (PG 123:365b).

118 Euthymius Zigabenus, *Expositio in Matthaum* (PG 129:544b).

119 So wenig zu bestreiten ist, dass andere Logien im koptischen *Thomasevangelium* ein vorsynoptisches Stadium der Überlieferung widerspiegeln können, so gewiss ist doch, dass *Thomasevangelium* 100 (NHC II,2, 49,27–31) mit dem Schlusssatz „und was mein ist, gebt mir“

ins Politische reichende Wirkung bei Justin gegeben. Abgaben und Steuern, so Justin, zahlen die Christen, denn dazu hat der Herr sie selbst angehalten. Dem Schlusssatz entnimmt Justin die Unterscheidung: „Darum beten wir zwar Gott allein an, euch aber leisten wir im Übrigen freudigen Gehorsam, indem wir euch als Könige und Herrscher der Menschen anerkennen und beten, daß ihr zusammen mit der Herrschaft auch die vernünftige Einsicht habt.“¹²⁰

Deutlicher imperiumskritisch ist die Auslegung der Stelle bei dem mittlerweile zum Montanismus gewechselten Tertullian, die darauf beruht, dass der Begriff *ἐκων*/imago sowohl in Gen 1,26 als auch in Mk 12,16 begegnet:

Gebt... das Bild des Kaisers, welches sich auf der Münze befindet, dem Kaiser, und das Ebenbild Gottes, das sich im Menschen findet, Gott, sodaß du dem Kaiser Geld gibst, Gott aber dich selbst. Andernfalls, wenn dem Kaiser alles gehören wird, was wird für Gott übrig sein?¹²¹

Clemens von Alexandria erfasst Jesu Schlusswort als allgemeine Lebensregel *περὶ πολιτείας*, deutet es aber nicht weiter aus.¹²² Origenes beleuchtet zum Text Matthäus 22,15–22 zunächst den zeitgeschichtlichen Hintergrund, wie es heutiger historisch-kritischer Exegese entspricht, wobei er, angeregt durch die Geschehnisse um Judas den Galiläer, als Position der Pharisäer ähnlich wie heute Gerd Theißen die Steuerverweigerung markiert.¹²³ Dann stellt er den doppelten Fallstrick für Jesus heraus.¹²⁴ Zu dem entscheidenden Jesuswort erklärt er: Man soll dem Kaiser nicht aufgrund einer *φαντασία θεοσεβείας* etwas vorenthalten, aber niemand wird aufgrund dessen, das er dem Kaiser geben soll, was des Kaisers ist, daran gehindert, das Gott zu Geben, was ihm zusteht.¹²⁵ Hippolyt kommentiert mit Mt 22,21 das Verhalten

eine Spiritualisierung darstellt, die sinnvoll sein konnte, als der ursprüngliche historische Kontext nicht mehr von Bedeutung war.

120 Justin, 1 *Apologie* 17.1–3 (PTS 38:158).

121 Tertullian, *De idololatria* 15.3–4 (CC.SL 2:1115–16). Die Deutung auf die je unterschiedliche Ebenbildlichkeit findet sich auch bei Augustinus, *Enarratio in Psalmos* 4.8 (CC.SL 38:17), und Beda Venerabilis, *Commentarius in Lucam* V (CC.SL 120:357).

122 Clemens von Alexandria, *Paed.* 3.91.3 (GCS 12³:286).

123 Origenes, *Commentaria in Evangelium secundum Matthaeum* 17.25 (GCS 40:652–655). Anders Theophylakt von Ochrid, *Enarratio in Evangelium S. Matthaei* (PG 123:389ab): Die Pharisäer erwarten, dass Jesus zur Steuerverweigerung aufruft.

124 Origenes, *Commentaria in Evangelium secundum Matthaeum* 17.26 (GCS 40:656).

125 Origenes, *Commentaria in Evangelium secundum Matthaeum* 17.26 (GCS 40:658).

Daniels: Seine Loyalität zum König hat an der Forderung des Königs nach Anbetung seines Bildes ein Ende.¹²⁶

Auf die Frage, was man Gott schuldet, antwortet Hilarius: *corpus, animam, voluntatem*. Dem Kaiser schulden wir, wenn wir ganz arm geworden sind, gar nichts mehr.¹²⁷ Hieronymus gibt den zweiten Teil der Antwort Jesu betreffend eine im Rahmen des Judentums zur Zeit Jesu liegende Interpretation:

*Porro quod ait Reddite quae sunt Caesaris Caesari, id est nummum, tributum et pecuniam, et quae sunt Dei Deo, decimas, primitias et oblationes ac victimas sentiamus, quomodo et ipse reddit tributa pro se et Petro (Mt 17,24–27), et Do reddit quae Dei sunt, Patris faciens voluntatem.*¹²⁸

Ferner, dass er sagt: Gebt dem Kaiser, was des Kaisers ist, das meint die Münze, die Steuern und das Geld; Die Worte „und Gott, was Gottes ist“, beziehen wir auf den Zehnten, die Erstlingsgaben und die Abgaben und die Opfer, wie er auch selbst für sich und Petrus die Tempelsteuer bezahlt hat, und er gibt Gott, was Gottes ist, indem er den Willen des Vaters erfüllt.

Faktisch nimmt Hieronymus damit Theißens Deutung auf Bereitwilligkeit zur doppelten Besteuerung vorweg.

Johannes Chrysostomus zufolge schließt der Vordersatz „Gebt dem Kaiser ...“ nur das ein, was die εὐσέβεια nicht schädigt.¹²⁹ Als imperiumskritischer Satz mag uns das gefallen; es schließt natürlich die heute in anderen Kontexten virulente Problematik ein. Kann eine prinzipiell multireligiöse Gesellschaft wie diejenige der Bundesrepublik Deutschland einzelnen Religionsgruppen wie dem Islam den Vorrang der Scharia gegenüber dem Grundgesetz einräumen?

Mk 12,17 par. Mt 22,21 hat eine eigene Wirkung erzielt in der Unterscheidung der Zuständigkeitsbereiche des nunmehr christlichen römischen Kaisers und der Bischöfe. So wird Ossius von Cordoba folgender Ausspruch zugeschrieben:

¹²⁶ Hippolyt, *In Daniele* 3.22.1 (GCS NF 7:176).

¹²⁷ Hilarius, *Commentarii in Matthaum* 23.2 (SC 258:154). Kyrill von Alexandria, *Commentarius in Lucam* (PG 72:889d) zufolge fordert Gott von uns den Glauben, die Liebe und den Wohlgeruch guter Werke.

¹²⁸ Hieronymus, *Commentarii in Matthaum* 22.21 (SC 259:148–150).

¹²⁹ Johannes Chrysostomus, *Homilia in evangelium Matthaeei* 70.2 (PG 58:656).

Bedenke, Kaiser, dass Du ein sterblicher Mensch bist! Fürchte den Tag des Gerichts, erhalte dich rein für ihn! Mische Dich nicht in kirchliche Dinge und erteile uns darin keine Befehle, sondern sei vielmehr unser Schüler. Dir hat Gott das Kaisertum geschenkt, uns hat er die kirchlichen Dinge anvertraut. ... Hüte dich, schwere Schuld auf Dich zu laden, indem Du die Dinge der Kirche an Dich ziehst! ... Gebet dem Kaiser, was des Kaisers ist, und Gott, was Gottes ist.¹³⁰

Theophylakt von Ochrid (10. Jh.) unterscheidet zu Mt 22,21 dergestalt, dass man in äußeren Dingen dem Kaiser, in inneren aber und geistlichen Dingen Gott gehorchen müsse, kennt aber auch die allegorische Auslegung des Kaisers auf den Teufel, den man das zurückgeben müsse, was ihm gehöre, z.B. den Zorn.¹³¹ Bei prinzipiell ähnlicher Auslegung betont Euthymius Zigabenus (11./12. Jh.) noch deutlicher, dass es „zurückgeben“ heißt. Bemerkenswert ist aber, dass Euthymius die doppelte Falle für Jesus richtig beschreibt. Wenn er zur Steuerzahlung aufruft, kann man die Massen gegen ihn aufhetzen mit dem Argument, er wolle das Gottesvolk einem Menschen untertan machen; wenn er zur Steuerverweigerung aufruft, kann man ihn des Aufruhrs bezichtigen.¹³² Das zuerst genannte Motiv der Unterwerfung kehrt wieder, wenn Euthymius den Sinn des Schlussgliedes „und das, was Gott gehört, Gott“ erklärt: Jesus rufe zur Steuerzahlung auf, aber man soll ihm nicht unterstellen können, er mache das Volk einem Menschen untertan.¹³³

6. Die Entwicklung weg von Ideologie- und Imperiumskritik

Wie kam es zum weitgehenden Verzicht auf ideologiekritische und in weitem auch auf imperiumskritische Praxis? Dafür gibt es mindestens zwei Ursachen.

1. Die in der Frühzeit gegen das Christentum gerichteten Vorwürfe zeigen, dass damals die Polemik gegen Christinnen und Christen vor allem von einem politisch wie religiös konservativen Standpunkt aus geführt

¹³⁰ Bei Athanasius, *Hist. Ar.* 44,6–8, möglicherweise unecht. Vorausgesetzt ist dabei eine Äußerung Konstantins gegenüber den bei ihn versammelten Bischöfen: „Ihr seid von Gott zu Bischöfen dessen bestellt, was innerhalb des Bereichs der Kirche liegt, ich aber zum Bischof dessen, was außerhalb desselben liegt“ (Eusebius von Caesarea, *Vit. Const.* 4.24 [GCS, 128]).

¹³¹ Theophylakt von Ochrid, *Enarratio in Evangelium S. Matthaei* (PG 123:389bc).

¹³² Euthymius Zigabenus, *Expositio in Matthaum* (PG 129:576cd).

¹³³ Euthymius Zigabenus, *Expositio in Matthaum* (PG 129:577b).

wurde. Eine dem Epikureismus nahestehende Kritik wie die des Lukian von Samosata hatte keinen erkennbaren politischen Einfluss. Man wird konservative Positionen, wie sie etwa in den Pastoralbriefen vertreten werden, am ehesten als Reaktion auf diese konservative und nur auf diese konservative Kritik verstehen.

2. Ab der Mitte bzw. dem Ende des 2. Jh. wird man mit der Nachwirkung bestimmter Bibelstellen rechnen, die erst einmal den Gehorsam der Christinnen und Christen gegenüber den staatlichen Autoritäten einfordern (z.B. Röm 13,1–7; Mk 12,17a; Mt 5,44; 1 Tim 2,1–4 und dann indirekt Joh 18,36). Solchen Aussagen gegenüber fühlte man sich damals nicht frei, ob man sich daran halten wollte oder nicht; die Johannesoffenbarung mit ihrer imperiumskritischen Sicht war im Osten lange Zeit nicht kanonisch anerkannt.

Allerdings sollte man hier auch nicht simplifizieren. Die Forderung der Obrigkeit gilt grundsätzlich, aber nicht dann, wenn diese uns befiehlt, den Glauben zu verleugnen. Dann, so Hippolyt, ist es „süß“, zu sterben, denn es gilt Röm 8,35: „Wer wird uns scheiden von der Liebe Gottes“; das Wort ist Mahnung und Trost zugleich.¹³⁴ Ferner ist die Auslegungsgeschichte von Röm 13,1–7 weitaus facettenreicher als es später zumindest im Luthertum die Regel ist. Bei Hippolyt hat die Gehorsamsforderung von Röm 13 ihre Grenze dann, wenn wir angehalten werden, etwas zu tun, was gegen die Prinzipien des Glaubens verstößt.¹³⁵ Mit einer Weitsicht, die man bei manchen neuzeitlichen Lutheranern schmerzlich vermisst, hat einstens Theodoret von Kyros Röm 13,1 kommentiert, wenn er vermerkt, von Gott gehe nicht aus, dass dieser oder jener die Herrschaft innehat, sondern nur, dass es das Gegenüber von Herrschen und Beherrschtwerden gibt.¹³⁶ Denn, so fragt Theodoret, wie kann von Gott die Wahl eines schlechten Menschen zum Herrscher ausgehen? Inwieweit hier das Gottesbild griechischer Philosophie im Geheimen einwirkt, dem gemäß Gott als Urheber des Guten und nur des Guten zu denken ist, kann man natürlich fragen; Theodoret bietet eine biblische Begründung für seine Exegese, nämlich Jer 3,15: „Ich will ihnen Hirten nach meinem Herzen geben, die sie mit Verstand weiden sollen“.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Hippolyt, *In Daniele* 3.24.4 (GCS 1:168).

¹³⁵ Hippolyt, *In Daniele* 3.23.2 (GCS NF 7:176).

¹³⁶ Auch Johannes Chrysostomus, *Homiliae in Epistulam ad Romanos* 23.1 (PG 60:615), unterscheidet: „Es heißt nicht ‚denn es gibt keine obrigkeitliche Person außer von Gott‘, sondern Paulus spricht von der Einrichtung, wenn er sagt, ‚denn es gibt keine Obrigkeit außer von Gott‘.“

¹³⁷ Theodoret von Kyros, *Interpretatio Epistulae ad Romanos* (PG 82:193c).

7. Zusammenfassung

Antike Christentumskritik zielte, was christliche religiöse Praxis betrifft, vor allem auf die christliche Verweigerung gegenüber der Teilnahme am Kultus für diejenigen Götter, die sonst von allen verehrt wurden. Diese Verweigerung, dazu der unbeirrbare Glaube auf der Basis einer Offenbarungsgewissheit bei vielen Christinnen und Christen stießen auf Widerstand und Ablehnung; demgegenüber hat auch der wiederholte Verweis auf politische Loyalität nicht viel geholfen.

Ideologiekritische Praxis ist im Christentum nur selten verwirklicht worden; die Klagen über die Hochschätzung des Reichtums und des sozialen Ansehens bei einzelnen Gemeindegliedern sprechen für sich. Dass die Option für den Eheverzicht von emanzipatorischen Idealen gesteuert war, hat sich nicht nachweisen lassen.

Imperiumskritisch gedeutet werden kann am ehesten der Verweis auf die fundamentale Wahrheit: Der römische Kaiser ist ein Mensch und kein Gott. Nachweisbar hat die Perikope von der Kaisersteuer (Mk 12,13–17; vgl. die in 1 Petr 2,17 gegebene Unterscheidung zwischen Furcht gegenüber Gott und Ehre gegenüber dem König) eingewirkt. In dieser Frage waren viele Christinnen und Christen kompromisslos bis zur Hingabe ihres eigenen Lebens, bis zum Martyrium.

Die Unterscheidung zwischen Kaiser und Gott wirkt, wie manche Äußerungen bei Konstantin der Große und Ossius von Cordoba zeigen, in der Unterscheidung zwischen weltlichem und geistlichem Verfügungsbereich nach. Konstantins Handeln mit der zunehmenden Bevorzugung des Christentums ist das Handeln des Römers, für den die richtige Verehrung des richtigen Gottes die wichtigste Voraussetzung für den Erhalt der *salus publica* darstellt. Den Gedanken der religiös begründeten Einheit des Imperium Romanum haben die Christen nicht grundsätzlich in Frage gestellt, sondern unter nunmehr christlichen Vorzeichen weitergeführt; das spiegelt sich in der Härte der innerchristlichen Auseinandersetzungen ebenso wie in der christlichen Intoleranz gegenüber nichtchristlicher Religiosität.

Imperiumskritische Äußerungen zielen aber nicht auf das politische System des Prinzipats, sondern betreffen die persönliche Qualifikation des betreffenden Herrschers. Das gilt selbst für Augustins kritische Äußerungen.

Der Blick in die Auslegungsgeschichte einiger hier zu behandeln der Passagen ist ebenfalls ernüchternd. Unpolitische Wahrnehmung liegt in der Exegese zu Mk 6,14–29 wie zu Mk 10,35–45 bzw. deren Parallelen im Matthäusevangelium vor. Mk 6,14–29 wurde im Sinne der Luxuskritik, aber

nicht der Ideologiekritik wahrgenommen, Mk 10,35–45 als Mahnung zur persönlichen Demut. Ansätze zur Imperiumskritik sind noch am ehesten zu Mk 12,13–17 geltend gemacht worden.

Der faktische Verlauf der Kirchengeschichte wie die Auslegungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte der genannten biblischen Texte dürfen natürlich die gegenwärtige sozioethische Debatte nicht majorisieren. Wirkungsgeschichte kann beschreiben, aber keine normativen Aussagen treffen, denn Wirkungsgeschichte zeigt auch immer, welche möglichen Sinnpotentiale eines Textes nicht verwirklicht wurden. Das muss im Zweifelsfall auch kritisch gegen Entwicklungen in Theologie und Kirchen gerichtet werden. Die marxistische Kritik am Christentum kam ja nicht von ungefähr. So ist es für uns geboten, in den sozialen Auseinanderentwicklungen in den westlichen Gesellschaften und in dem Problem des Ausgleichs zu den Gesellschaften der so genannten Dritten Welt biblische Positionen zugunsten jeweils der Schwachen geltend zu machen.

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„Ein Beispiel habe ich euch gegeben...“ (Joh 13,15)

Die Diakonie Jesu und die Diakonie der Christen
in der johanneischen Fußwaschungserzählung als
Konterkarierung römischer Alltagskultur*

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1. Einleitung

Das sozial-kulturelle System der römischen Herrschaft, die Definition und die Durchsetzung des römischen Machtanspruches haben erheblichen, oft unterschätzten Einfluss auf jüdische und christliche Minderheiten, ihr Leben und ihre sich weiter entwickelnde Selbstverständigung. An dieser mehrschichtigen Auseinandersetzung und Abgrenzung hat auch das Johannesevangelium¹ erkennbaren Anteil. Dem widerspricht nicht die Wahrnehmung, dass das Johannesevangelium sich zunächst und primär an die eigenen Gemeindeglieder richtet und ihren Glauben stärken will. Gerade zur Verwirklichung dieser Absicht gilt es, die Begründung, innere Plausibilität und Kraft des christlichen Bekenntnisses so vorzutragen, dass die johanneischen Christen in ihrer vorfindlichen und vertrauten kulturellen Umwelt einerseits und der *Pax Romana* andererseits die ihrem Bekenntnis eigene sozio-kulturelle Identität finden und konstruktiv verteidigen können. Allein schon ausweislich des Prologes eignet dem Johannesevangelium ein kosmologisch-schöpfungstheologischer Anspruch. Anthropologie, Metaphorik und Ethik des vierten Evangeliums denken

* Der vorliegende Beitrag ist die überarbeitete Fassung meiner Antrittsvorlesung als Privatdozent an der Theologischen Fakultät der Friedrich-Schiller Universität Jena am 19.6.2012. Für die Unterstützung und freundschaftliche Wegbegleitung bei meiner Umhabilitation bin ich besonders Prof. Dr. Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr zu großem Dank verpflichtet. Mein Dank gilt zudem dem gesamten Kollegium der Theologischen Fakultät in Jena und dem Oberseminar NT in Jena.

¹ Zur neueren Johannesforschung vgl. Konrad Haldimann & Hans Weder, „Aus der Literatur zum Johannesevangelium 1985–1994,“ *ThR* 71 (2006): 91–113; Jörg Frey, „Grundfragen der Johannesinterpretation im Spektrum neuerer Gesamtdarstellungen,“ *ThLZ* 133 (2008): 743–760 (Lit.); Jörg Frey, *Die Herrlichkeit des Gekreuzigten. Studien zu den Johanneischen Schriften I* (hg. J. Schlegel; WUNT 307; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013) (Lit.) Vgl. hierzu die ausführliche Rezension in *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 139 (2014): 576–579; Johannes Beutler, *Das Johannesevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder, 2013) (Lit.).

universell und bieten vielfältige Anknüpfungs- und Vermittlungsangebote für unterschiedliche philosophische, kulturelle und religiöse Konzepte. Der Evangelist Johannes vertritt eine universelle Soteriologie und eine klare christologisch verankerte missionarische Strategie.

Das vierte Evangelium wird in der Regel nicht mit dem Stichwort Diakonie² in Verbindung gebracht – der Wortstamm διακονέω begegnet nur in 12,26 (zweimal διακονέω; einmal διάκονος).³ Der nachfolgende Beitrag zeigt am Beispiel der johanneischen Deutung der Fußwaschung Jesu dennoch, dass und wie diakonische Praxis der Christen – orientiert am „Beispiel“ Jesu (13,15) – die soziale Praxis der dominanten römischen Alltagskultur intelligent konterkariert. Dazu wird das Ritual der Fußwaschung in neue Sinnzusammenhänge gestellt (Reframing), mit neuen Deutungsebenen ausgestattet und so zu einem erschließenden Ritual der christlichen Glaubenspraxis aufgewertet.

2. Der Ort des letzten Mahles Jesu in der erzählerischen Komposition und theologischen Intention des Johannesevangeliums

Das Johannesevangelium ist – hier ist nur eine erste Annäherung möglich – in zwei Hauptteile aufgeteilt. Der erste Hauptteil geht um Jesu Offenbarungswirken in Wort und Tat (Joh 1,19–11,57) – hier spielen die sieben „Zeichen“ eine herausragende Rolle. Er schließt mit der Verurteilung Jesu durch den Hohen Rat aufgrund der „Zeichen“ und des durch diese Zeichen ausgelösten Glaubens (11,47–52[53–57]). Der zweite Hauptteil umfasst Jesu Abschied, sein Tod, die Ostererfahrungen und die Sendung der Jünger (13,1–21,25). Eröffnet wird das Johannesevangelium von dem sprachlich und theologisch hochkarätigen Prolog (1,1–18), der den theologischen Anspruch und die Reichweite des Evangelisten ins Wort hebt, die Kernbotschaft des Evangeliums verdichtet vorstellt und gleichzeitig eine geschickte Leserführung

2 Vgl. einführend Klaus Scholtissek, „Neutestamentliche Grundlagen der Diakonie,“ in *Armut und Armenfürsorge. Protestantische Perspektiven* (hg. Ralf Koerrenz & Benjamin Bunk; Kultur und Bildung, Band 5; Paderborn: Schöningh 2014), 33–47.

3 Der Sache nach wird das Thema Diakonie in der Fußwaschungserzählung (Joh 13,1–17) ausführlich verhandelt. In der Johannesforschung wird diese Fragestellung bisher völlig unzureichend berücksichtigt. Die folgenden Ausführungen fragen neu nach der johanneischen Deutung der Fußwaschung Jesu und den Konsequenzen für die johanneische Darstellung der Diakonie Jesu und der Diakonie der Christen.

intoniert. Das Kapitel 12,1–50 zwischen den beiden Hauptteilen hat eine (noch viel zu wenig beachtete) Scharnierfunktion.⁴

Mit dem Vers 13,1 beginnt der zweite Hauptteil des Johannesevangeliums. Dieser Vers ist vom Evangelisten als Überschrift zum letzten Mahl Jesu und gleichzeitig zum gesamten zweiten Hauptteil gestaltet worden.⁵

Vor dem Paschafest aber, als Jesus erkannte, dass seine Stunde gekommen war, aus dieser Welt zum Vater hinüberzugehen, und da er die Seinen liebte, die in der Welt waren, liebte er sie bis zur Vollendung (εἰς τέλος).

Dieser Vers hat zunächst einleitenden Charakter: Zeitangabe und Protagonist werden genannt. Gleichzeitig ist die *prima facie* harmlos daher kommende Zeitangabe „vor dem Paschafest“ als theologische Zeitangabe zu lesen bzw. hören: Jesu Wirken, seine Sendung, sein bevorstehender Tod stehen in einem inhaltlichen Verhältnis zum Festinhalt des Paschafestes (vgl. 1,29.36; 2,13.23). Gleichzeitig wird diese Deutung durch eine zweite nachfolgende Zeitangabe verstärkt: Jetzt – darauf weist der Erzähler seine Hörer unmissverständlich hin – ist die wiederholt angesagte und mit Spannung erwartete „Stunde“ Jesu (vgl. 2,4; 12,23) gekommen. Über diese Stunde Jesu, die eben nicht zufällig in unmittelbarer Nähe mit dem Paschafest steht, handeln die folgenden Ausführungen in Joh 13 und im gesamten zweiten Hauptteil.

Der Erzähler spricht in diesem Vers weitere in der narrativen⁶ und theologischen Linienführung des Evangelisten zentrale Inhalte an: die Sendung Jesu vom Vater in diese Welt und wieder aus dieser Welt zurück zum Vater; sodann den inneren Grund und Antrieb seiner Sendung: die Liebe zu den Seinen, die Jesus mit und in der gekommenen Stunde als εἰς τέλος erweist. „Gemeint ist die Manifestation seiner Liebe zu den Seinigen, die am Ende steht und unübertrefflich ist. Denn εἰς τέλος kann sowohl einen zeitlichen wie

4 Margareta Gruber betont in erhellender Weise die Verbindungslinien zwischen der Salbung der Füße Jesu durch Maria in 12,1–2 und der Fußwaschung Jesu. Gruber, „Zumutung der Gegenseitigkeit. Zur johanneischen Deutung des Todes Jesu anhand einer pragmatisch-intertextuellen Lektüre“ in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (hg. Gilbert van Belle; BETL 200; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 647–60.

5 Joh 13,1 ist sowohl die „Überschrift zum ganzen 2. Hauptteil als auch die Einleitung der Fußwaschung im joh. Verständnis.“ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium. Bd. 3* (Freiburg: Herder, 1986), 17.

6 Zur Bedeutung der Narratologie für die Auslegung des Johannesevangeliums vgl. zuletzt *Narrativität und Theologie im Johannesevangelium* (hg. Jörg Frey & Uta Poplutz; BThSt 130; Neukirchen-Vlyun: Neukirchener Verlag, 2012); Tanja Schultheiss, *Das Petrusbild im Johannesevangelium* (WUNT II 329; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

einen qualitativ-eminenten Sinn haben.⁷ „Bis zur Vollendung“ bezieht sich auf die Hingabe Jesu in den Tod – eben diese wird in der Fußwaschung gedeutet.

Es ist kein Zufall, sondern johanneische Komposition, dass das letzte Wort Jesu am Kreuz: τετέλεσται („es ist vollbracht/vollendet“; 19,30), das letzte Wort in der Überschrift des zweiten Hauptteils (13,1) wieder aufnimmt und jetzt im Moment des Todes Jesu die Vollendung seiner Sendung, seiner Liebe zu den Seinen, bekräftigt. Auch diese verbale Brücke bestätigt den Überschriftcharakter von 13,1 für den gesamten zweiten Hauptteil. Es ist ebenfalls kein Zufall, dass der Evangelist mit dem Stichwort „die Seinen“ (οἱ ἱδοι) an den Prolog (1,11) und die Hirtenrede in Kapitel 10 anknüpft.

Zum theologischen Profil des Johannesevangeliums gehören folgende charakteristische Merkmale. Was sich bei den synoptischen Evangelien bereits abzeichnet und keimhaft andeutet, das führt der Evangelist Johannes konsequent weiter. Im Sinne einer Verschmelzung der Zeiten⁸ unterscheidet der Evangelist nicht mehr zwischen den Worten des vor-österlichen und denen des nachösterlichen Jesus. Im irdischen Jesus spricht schon der Auferstandene. Diese konsequente Weiterführung synoptischer Tendenzen zu einer nachösterlichen Hermeneutik (vgl. Joh 2,22; 16,13) trifft ebenfalls für die konsequent vorangetriebene Transparenz der Dialoge Jesu mit seinen Jüngern in Richtung auf die nachösterliche Gemeinde zu. Die ersten Jünger Jesu, die von Johannes dem Täufer zu Jesus verwiesen werden (vgl. 1,35–51), die Teilnehmenden an der Hochzeit zu Kana (Joh 2,1–11), der Ratsherr Nikodemus (Joh 3), die Samariterin (Joh 4) und alle weiteren Dialoge und Begegnungen mit Jesus sind konsequent so erzählt, dass sich Christen der Gemeinden, für die der Evangelist in seiner Zeit schreibt, in diesen Personen wiedererkennen können, ihre eigenen Glaubenswege durchbuchstabiert sehen.

In diesem Sinne ist das Johannesevangelium ein eminent katechetisches, im Blick auf die Glaubensbiographie des einzelnen Menschen ein in den Glauben und im Glauben führendes, ein mystagogisches Evangelium.⁹ Dem Evangelisten geht es um Glaubensvertiefung, um das Überwinden von Glaubenswiderständen, von vordergründigen Missverständnissen. Dieses

7 Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium*, 16.

8 Vgl. hierzu grundlegend Christina Hoegen-Rohls, *Der nachösterliche Johannes. Die Abschiedsrede als hermeneutischer Schlüssel zum vierten Evangelium* (WUNT II 84; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996); Jörg Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie I–III* (WUNT 96 / 110 / 116; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997 / 1998 / 2000); Jörg Frey, „Eschatology in the Johannine Circle,“ in idem, *Herrlichkeit*, 663–98.

9 Vgl. Annegret Meyer, *Kommt und seht. Mystagogie im Johannesevangelium ausgehend von Joh 1,35–51* (FzB 103; Würzburg: Echter, 2005).

theologische Profil des Johannesevangeliums lässt sich in allen Kapiteln aufweisen, in den Begegnungsgeschichten, den sieben Zeichen, den Reden Jesu, dem Abschied und den Abschiedsreden Jesu, den Szenen am Kreuz, seinen Osterbegegnungen.¹⁰

Auch die Darstellung des letzten Mahles Jesu¹¹ ist von diesem Anliegen des Evangelisten durchdrungen.

3. Aufbau und Leserführung in Joh 13,1–30

Nachdem die Doppelfunktion des einleitenden Verses 13,1 als Überschrift für das Kapitel 13 und für den gesamten zweiten Hauptteil des Johannesevangeliums vorgestellt wurde, geht es im Folgenden um den Aufbau und die Gedankenführung in Joh 13,1–30. Das letzte Mahl Jesu mit seinen Jüngern lässt sich in zwei Teile gliedern: die Fußwaschung als Sinnbild des erlösenden Lebensdienstes Jesu und als Vorbild für seine Jünger (13,2–17) und der Verrat des Judas als Gegenbild eines Jüngers Jesu (13,18–30).

Die Aufmerksamkeit gilt hier vornehmlich Vv. 2–17, die eine Dreigliederung aufweisen. Der Handlung Jesu folgen ein Dialog und ein Monolog:

Vv. 2–5:	Die Fußwaschung Jesu
Vv. 6–11:	Dialog: Jesus und Simon Petrus
Vv. 12–17:	Ansprache Jesu an seine Jünger

- (a) Vv. 2–5: Die Fußwaschung selbst ist in aller Einfachheit und Nüchternheit geschildert. Nach der Situationsangabe „Und als ein Mahl war, ... (13,2) folgen konkludent sieben Verben: aufstehen, Gewand ablegen,

¹⁰ Vgl. dazu exemplarisch Klaus Scholtissek, „Mündiger Glaube. Zur Architektur und Pragmatik johanneischer Begegnungsgeschichten (Joh 5 und Joh 9),“ in *Paulus und Johannes. Exegetische Studien zur paulinischen und johanneische Theologie und Literatur. Festschrift Jürgen Becker* (hg. Ulrich Mell & Dieter Sänger; WUNT 198; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 75–105.

¹¹ Joh 13 verdient eine neue, intensive exegetische Diskussion. Als neuere Beiträge vgl. Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 582–594; Hartwig Thyen, „εἰ μὴ τοῦς πόδας (Joh 13,10). Die Wirkungsgeschichte einer frühen Glosse,“ in idem, *Studien zum Corpus Johanneum* (WUNT 214; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 595–602; Anton Stimpfle, „Teilhabe in Hingabe. Zur ‚Fremdheit‘ der johanneischen Fußwaschung (Joh 13,1–17),“ in *Verantwortete Exegese. Hermeneutische Zugänge – Exegetische Studien – Systematische Reflexionen – Ökumenische Perspektiven – Praktische Konkretionen. Festschrift Franz Georg Untergaßmair* (hg. Gerhard Hotze & Egon Spiegel; Vechtaer Beiträge zur Theologie 13; Münster: LIT Verlag, 2006), 219–29; Jörg Frey, „Ethical Traditions, Family Ethos and Love in the Johannine Literature,“ in idem., *Herrlichkeit*, 768–802, 793–96; Beutler, *Johannesevangelium*, 376–93.

Leinentuch nehmen, sich umgürten, Wasser ins Becken schütten, Füße waschen, trocknen. Dieser einfache Erzählstil wird durch eine sprachlich und grammatikalisch schwierige Parenthese unterbrochen und aufgebrochen:

Und als ein Mahl war – der Teufel hatte Judas Iskariot, dem Sohn Simons, schon ins Herz gegeben, ihn auszuliefern;
Jesus wusste, dass ihm der Vater alles in die Hände gegeben hat und dass er von Gott ausgegangen ist und zu Gott zurückkehrt – ... (13,2–3)

Es ist kein Wunder, dass sich daran literarkritische Diskussionen entzündeten, denen hier nicht nachgegangen werden kann. Die Aufgabe, den vorliegenden Endtext des Johannesevangeliums zu interpretieren, darf dabei nicht aus dem Auge verloren werden.

Formal lässt sich diese Parenthese als eingeschobener Erzählerkommentar kennzeichnen. Der Erzähler gibt seinen Lesern bzw. Hörern zwei Hinweise. Der erste ist neu: Es geht um den Verrat des Judas im Vorgriff auf 13,18–30, die das Gegenbild zur Fußwaschung Jesu ausleuchten. Der zweite Hinweis nimmt die schon in V. 1 angesprochene Sendungschristologie auf und entfaltet diese.

Die Parenthese verknüpft also die nüchterne Fußwaschungserzählung mit der Überschrift in 13,1 und dem zweiten Teil der Erzählung in Joh 13. Beide Hinweise, der Vorverweis auf den Verrat des Judas und der Rückverweis auf die johanneische Sendungschristologie, sind offensichtlich unverzichtbare Interpretationsbezüge für den nüchternen Bericht der Fußwaschung Jesu. Die Einspielung der verstärkend ausgeführten Sendungschristologie betont die johanneische Zielaussage: „Der niedrige Dienst verweist auf den Tod Jesu, der doch als Anteilgabe am Heil ein Dienst voll innerer Hoheit ist.“¹²

- (b) Vv.6–11: Ausgangspunkt des kurzen Dialoges zwischen Petrus und Jesus ist der Einwand des Petrus: „Herr (κύριε), Du wäschst mir die Füße?“ (13,6). Petrus fasst das in klare Worte, was gewissermaßen in der Luft liegt: Warum wäscht der Kyrios seinen Jüngern die Füße? Denn das, was Jesus tut, ist eine anstößige und offensichtlich unverständliche Umkehrung der tatsächlichen Verhältnisse. Das soziale Paradoxon, das Petrus in aller Klarheit anspricht, wird noch dadurch gesteigert, dass der Titel κύριος im NT und auch im Johannesevangelium die Konnotation des Gottesnamens bzw. der Gottesanrede in der Septuaginta trägt.

12 Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium*, 19.

Der in Frageform gehaltene Einwand des Petrus ist erzähltheoretisch von doppelter Bedeutung: Petrus stellt die Frage, die aufgrund des Tuns Jesu jedem Leser und Hörer des Johannesevangeliums auf den Lippen liegt – er stellt die Frage der Lesenden und Hörenden, die Frage, die gestellt werden muss! Und zweitens gibt der Einwand des Petrus Jesus die Möglichkeit zu antworten, sein Tun zu deuten. Jeder Versuch, von der hier gestellten Frage des Petrus auf seine geschichtliche Persönlichkeit zurückzuschließen, ist deshalb unangebracht.

Schließlich steht die Frage des Petrus in einer typisch johanneischen Tradition. Zahlreiche Dialoge zwischen Jesus und einer zweiten Person nehmen ihren Ausgang beim Nichtbegreifen bzw. einem Missverständnis, das durch Jesu Antwort auf einen tieferen Sinn hin erschlossen wird.¹³ Ein Beispiel dafür ist Nikodemus, der fragt: „Wie kann ein Mensch geboren werden, wenn er alt ist? Kann er denn wieder in seiner Mutter Leib gehen und geboren werden?“ (3,4) oder die Samariterin, die bemerkt: „Herr, du hast doch nichts, womit du schöpfen könntest, und der Brunnen ist tief; woher hast du dann lebendiges Wasser?“ (4,11). In den Fragen der Menschen im Johannesevangelium spiegeln sich die Fragen der Christen in der johanneischen Gemeinde. Ihre Fragen werden gestellt, ihre zu kurz greifende Missverständnisse werden artikuliert – nicht, um sie vorzuführen, sondern um alle Lesenden und Hörenden auf den Weg zu einem vertieften Verstehen der Sendung Jesu mitzunehmen.¹⁴ Eben darum geht es auch hier: Die Fußwaschung Jesu kann und soll irritieren, sie kann missverstanden werden – Jesus aber geht es um das richtige Verständnis seines Tuns.

Jesu erste Antwort, „was Ich tue, verstehst Du jetzt nicht, du wirst es aber nachher verstehen,“ (13,7) klingt zunächst rätselhaft. Sie verweist auf einen späteren Zeitpunkt des Verstehens – für die aufmerksamen Leser des Johannesevangeliums ist die Zeitangabe „nachher“ jedoch klar. Es geht ausweislich von 13,1 um „die Stunde“ Jesu, es geht um seinen Tod, seine Auferstehung und das vom Wirken des Geistes getragene nachösterliche Verstehen des gesamten Lebensweges Jesu. Erst im Licht der Auferstehung Jesu wird die Fußwaschung seiner Jünger angemessen und richtig verständlich.

Der zweite Einwand des Petrus „Nicht sollst du meine Füße waschen bis in Ewigkeit“ (V. 8) betont das Nichtverstehen des Petrus – der

¹³ Vgl. u.a. 3,4; 4,11,31–34; 6,7–9,67–70; 9,2–5; 11,8–10; 14,5–10.

¹⁴ Vgl. auch 13,27–29. Auch hier werden zu kurz greifende Deutungen der Worte Jesu zurückgewiesen.

wohlwollende Leser ist dem Petrus schon ein Stück voraus. Aber auch dieser zweite Widerstand des Petrus hat seine erzählerische Funktion. Sie ermöglicht Jesus eine zweite Antwort: „Wenn ich Dich nicht wasche, hast du keinen Anteil an mir“ (V. 8). Hier geht es nicht um den Zeitpunkt und die Möglichkeitsbedingungen des Verstehens, sondern um das Ziel der Sendung Jesu insgesamt, wie um das Ziel der Zeichenhandlung Jesu, der Fußwaschung: Es geht um die Anteilhabe an Jesus selbst.

Es geht ums Ganze: Jesu Heilssendung, seine Lebensgabe kommt dort zum Ziel, wo die Jünger Jesu vor Ostern wie die Jünger Jesu zu allen Zeiten nach Ostern Jesu Tun zulassen und dieses im Licht des Osterglaubens deuten. Jesu gesamte Sendung ist ein Lebens-Dienst für die Menschen, in der Fußwaschung wird dieses Sinnziel des Wirkens Jesu fokussiert. Jesus macht in dieser Zeichenhandlung „seine Hingabe in den Tod für die Jünger anschaulich und wirksam ... kraft seiner Liebe, die sie dadurch bis zum äußersten erfahren“.¹⁵ Im Kern geht es um die Anteilhabe an Jesus, an dem Leben, das er schenkt, an seiner Beziehung zum Vater, an seiner nachösterlichen Herrlichkeit. Im Johannesevangelium ist Jesus ausweislich der „Ich-bin“-Worte in persona das Heilsgeschenk Gottes an die Menschen: „Ich bin das Brot des Lebens“ (6,35); „Ich bin der Weg, die Wahrheit und das Leben“ (14,6).

Die Antwort des Petrus (V. 9) zeigt erneut ein vordergründiges Missverständnis. Es ist nicht die Verteilung des Waschwassers über alle Körperteile, die zum Anteil an Jesus selbst führt, sondern das Tun Jesu in seiner Selbsthingabe in den Tod und die Bereitschaft, diesen Weg Jesu als heilsam anzunehmen.

- (c) Vv. 12–17: In den nächsten Versen hält Jesus eine feierliche Ansprache an seine Jünger. In der Einleitung markiert der Evangelist den Abschluss der Fußwaschung – Jesus nimmt wie zu Beginn der Mahlzeit die Rolle des sitzenden Lehrers ein. Jesus betont ausdrücklich die ihm zustehenden hoheitlichen Titel „Lehrer“ und „Kyrios“. Er verwendet die im Johannesevangelium öfters begegnende, die Vollmacht Jesu betonende Einleitungsformel: „Amen, amen, ich sage euch: ...“ und gebraucht abschließend eine Seligpreisung.

Aufgrund der einleitenden Frage „Versteht ihr, was ich euch getan habe?“ (V. 12) geht es erneut um das Verstehen. Um das Verstehen des Tuns Jesu ging es ja schon beim vorausgehenden Dialog mit Petrus. Wiederholt sich also die Aussageabsicht aus Vv. 6–11 in Vv. 12–17? Nein, sie wiederholt sich nicht. Der Ansprache Jesu geht es um ein neues

¹⁵ Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium*, bes. 21.

Moment, das offensichtlich zum Verstehen der Fußwaschung *respective* der Sendung Jesu konstitutiv dazugehört.

Zunächst bestätigt Jesus das schon von Petrus angesprochene Paradoxon der Fußwaschung. Es ist tatsächlich der „Lehrer“ und „Kyrios“ seiner Jünger, der ihnen die Füße gewaschen hat (V. 13). Aus dieser Wahrnehmung und Beschreibung der Situation leitet Jesus die entscheidende Schlussfolgerung ab. Wenn schon der „Lehrer“ und „Kyrios“ seinen Jüngern die Füße gewaschen hat, dann „müssen“ auch die Jünger einander die Füße waschen (V. 14). Jesus verweist zur weiteren vertiefenden Begründung auf das vorbildliche „Beispiel“, das er ihnen gegeben hat (V. 15) und erinnert an eine plausible Lebenswahrheit. Der Knecht ist nicht größer als sein Kyrios und der Gesandte nicht größer als der Sendende (V. 16).

Mit anderen Worten: Die von Jesus gesandten Jünger können ihre Sendung nicht anders gestalten und verwirklichen als in der Nachfolge des „Beispiels“ Jesu. Ein anderer Weg als der Weg Jesu steht ihnen nicht zur Verfügung. Jesu Seligpreisung (V. 17) gilt denen und nur denen, die dem Beispiel Jesu tatsächlich und in adäquater Entsprechung folgen. Dieser Weg Jesu, das Ur-Bild der Jüngernachfolge, wird im Johannesevangelium insgesamt und in der Fußwaschungserzählung in besonderer Dichte veranschaulicht.

Zur Vertiefung und Absicherung der bisherigen Auslegungsschritte werden die beiden folgenden Fragestellungen vertieft: die Bedeutung der Fußwaschung in der zeitgenössischen Umwelt und die Fußwaschung als Zeichenhandlung bzw. als paradoxe Intervention.

4. Die Bedeutung der Fußwaschung in der zeitgenössischen Alltagskultur und vor dem Hintergrund römischen Standesdenkens

In der Umwelt des Neuen Testaments¹⁶ lassen sich drei zeitgenössische Konnotationen der Fußwaschung identifizieren.

- (a) In der griechisch-römischen Literatur finden sich zahlreiche Belege, die direkt oder beiläufig Zeugnis davon geben, dass das Fußwaschen

¹⁶ Vgl. Bernhard Kötting & D. Halama, „Fußwaschung,“ in *RAC* 8 (1972): 743–45; John Christopher Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (JSNTSup 61; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 26–56; Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium* (ThKNT 4.2; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001), 91–93 (zu Zeugnissen in der rabbinischen Tradition).

als typische Aufgabe von Sklaven, Dienern und Mägden vertraut war. Die hierarchische Unterordnung der Fußwaschenden wurde so dokumentiert und bekräftigt. Ein anschauliches Beispiel ist uns bei Plutarch überliefert:

Als es aber Zeit für die Hauptmahlzeit war und der Kapitän das Essen aus den Vorräten zubereitete, sah Favonius [ein Prätor des Pompeius], daß Pompeius in Ermangelung von Sklaven begann, seine eigenen Schuhe auszuziehen, und eilte herbei, zog ihm die Schuhe aus und salbte seine Füße (Plutarch, *Pompeius* 73.6).¹⁷

Schon die Bekleidung mit einem Lendenschurz, der zum Abtrocknen der Füße nach dem Fußwaschen verwendet werden konnte, gilt für sich genommen als Ausdruck einer Standeszuordnung. In Suetons *Kaiservita* zu *Caligula* heißt es:

Mit ebenso wenig Ehrerbietung und Milde ging er (scil. Caligula) mit dem Senat um. Einige Senatoren, die höchste Ämter verwaltet hatten, ließ er einige Meilen in der Toga neben seinem Reisewagen herlaufen und, während er speiste, einmal unter dem Sofa, einmal zu seinen Füßen nur mit einem Lendenschurz bekleidet stehen (Sueton, *Caligula* 26.2).¹⁸

- (b) Vorwiegend in der jüdischen Tradition aber auch in der griechisch-römischen Überlieferung wird die Fußwaschung als Ausdruck der Reinheit und der Nähe zu Gott bzw. der einen Gottheit verstanden. Nach Philo besprengen sich die Priester beim Betreten des Heiligtums Hände und Füße als „Sinnbild fleckenlosen Lebens und reinen Lebenswandels in lobenswerten Werken“ (vgl. Philo, *Vita Mosis* 2.138¹⁹). Das Waschen der

17 Zitiert nach *Neuer Wettstein. Texte zum Neuen Testament aus Griechenland und Hellenismus. Band I/2* (hg. Udo Schnelle unter Mitarbeit von Michael Labahn und Manfred Lang; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), 641. Vgl. auch Homer, *Odyssee* 19.317–324.343–348.386–388; Herodot 2.172–175; 6.19.2; Catull 64.158–163.

18 Hans Martinet, *C. Suetonis Tranquillus. Die Kaiserviten – De vita Caesarum* (Düsseldorf/Zürich: Artemis & Winkler, 1997), 485; zitiert nach *Neuer Wettstein*, 636.

19 Philo, *Vita Mosis* 2.138: „Diese [sc. die erzenen Spiegel der Frauen] nahm der Künstler, und er beschloss, sie zu schmelzen und nichts anderes als das Waschbecken aus ihnen zu verfertigen, damit die Priester beim Betreten des Heiligtums (...) dies als Gefäß für das Sprengwasser, besonders beim Waschen von Händen und Füßen benützten – ein Sinnbild fleckenlosen Lebens und reinen Lebenswandels in lobenswerten Werken ...“

„Eingeweide“ bzw. „des Bauches“ und „der Füße“ wird als „Reinigung“ verstanden:

... mit dem Bauch deutet das Gesetz auf die Begierde hin, deren Reinigung sehr heilsam ist, da sie mit Befleckungen, Besudelungen, Trunksucht und Völlerei behaftet ist, also auf den schlimmsten Schädling, der zum Verderben für unser Leben uns angeheftet und ausgeschmiedet ist. Das Waschen der Füße aber bedeutet, dass wir nicht mehr auf Erden gehen, sondern in Aethers Höhen schweben sollen; denn in Wahrheit schwebt ja die Seele des von Liebe zu Gott erfüllten Menschen von der Erde hinauf zum Himmel und wandelt beflügelt in der Höhe ... (Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 1.206–207; vgl. Philo, *Legum allegoriae* 3.143).²⁰

- (c) Besonders bei *Josef und Aseneth*, einer zeitgenössischen Schrift „an der Schnittstelle zwischen jüdischer Novelle und griechischem Roman, namentlich dem Abenteuer- und Liebesroman“,²¹ findet sich ein beeindruckendes Zeugnis zum Fußwaschen als Ausdruck der Liebe und Beziehungsintensität.²²

Josef und Aseneth 20.1–5: [1] Und sie umschlangen einander lange und verflochten die Bande ihrer Hände. Und Aseneth sprach zu Joseph: „Wohlan, mein Herr (κύριέ μου), tritt ein in unser Haus. Ich habe nämlich unser Haus vorbereitet und ein großes Mahl gemacht.“ [2] Sie ergriff seine rechte Hand, führte ihn in ihr Haus und setzte ihn auf den Thronsessel ihres Vaters. Und sie brachte Wasser, um seine Füße zu waschen. [3] Joseph sprach zu ihr: „Es soll doch eine deiner Jungfrauen kommen und meine Füße waschen!“ [4] Und Aseneth sagte: „Mitnichten, mein Herr (κύριέ μου), denn von jetzt an bist du mein Herr, und ich deine Sklavin. Warum sagst du das, eine andere Jungfrau solle deine Füße waschen? Deine Füße sind ja meine Füße, deine Hände sind meine Hände, deine Seele ist meine Seele.“ [5] Und sie bedrängte ihn und wusch seine Füße. Josef betrachtete ihre Hände. Sie waren wie Hände des Lebens und ihre Finger wie Finger

²⁰ Vgl. auch Plinius, *Naturalis historia* 24.103.

²¹ Vgl. hierzu im Überblick Manuel Vogel, „Einführung“ in *Josef und Aseneth* (hg. Eckart Reinmuth; Sapere 15; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 3–31, 6. Vogel datiert *Josef und Aseneth* in die zweiten Hälfte des 1. Jh. n. Chr. bzw. die ersten Jahre des 2. Jh. n. Chr. (vgl. bes. 11–15).

²² Vgl. auch *Josef und Aseneth* 7.1.

eines von Liebe ergriffenen Schnellschreibers. Und danach ergriff Joseph ihre rechte Hand und küsste sie. Und Aseneth küsste sein Haupt und setzte sich zu seiner Rechten.²³

In der johanneischen Fußwaschungserzählung finden sich alle drei Konnotationen aus der zeitgenössischen Umwelt wieder – jeweils in spezieller Profilierung:

- (a) Die in der zeitgenössischen Umwelt selbstverständliche hierarchische Zuordnung von Fußwaschung an die Untergebenen und niederen Dienste wird in Joh 13 einerseits von Petrus vorausgesetzt und zum Gegenstand seines ersten Einwandes gemacht. Gleichzeitig betont Jesus seine hoheitliche Sendung als Lehrer und Kyrios. Andererseits durchbricht Jesus in seinem Tun diese Rollenzuweisung in paradoxer Umkehrung bei ausdrücklicher Wahrung seines Status als Lehrer und Kyrios.
- (b) Das Thema der Reinheit und der sich daraus ergebenden (wachsenden) Gottesnähe greift Joh 13 in Vv. 10–11 auf. Die erstrebte Reinheit ist durch die Fußwaschung, genauerhin durch die in der Fußwaschung gedeutete Lebenshingabe Jesu, vollumfänglich bewirkt. Die Jünger Jesu sind „rein“ – mit der einen Ausnahme des Judas. Zwischen Judas auf der einen Seite und Jesus und seinen Jüngern auf der anderen Seite verläuft die Trennlinie zwischen rein und unrein.
- (c) In der johanneischen Fußwaschungserzählung geht es nicht um die erotische Liebe zwischen Mann und Frau, es geht jedoch sehr wohl um Liebe (vgl. 13,1,34–35; 15, 9–17 bes. 15,13; „Niemand hat eine größere Liebe als der, der sein Leben gibt für seine Freunde“: Lebenshingabe als höchste Konsequenz der Liebe) und die durch die praktizierte Liebe Jesu gewonnene Beziehungstiefe (vgl. 13,8: Anteil haben an Jesus). Aseneth versteht ihr Tun – sie besteht darauf, dass sie allein und niemand sonst Josef die Füße wäscht – als Liebesdienst, den sie dem Geliebten und nur ihm erweisen will. Als Liebesdienst versteht auch Jesus sein Tun an den Jüngern – in der Hingabe seines Lebens in den Tod (vgl. 15,13). Diese Lebenshingabe in den Tod wird in der Fußwaschung als reinigender und beziehungsstiftender Lebensdienst gedeutet.

23 Übersetzung nach Eckart Reinmuth. Vgl. Christoph Burchard, *Joseph und Aseneth*, (JSHRZ 2.4; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 1983), 683. Vgl. auch *Catull* 64.158–163; *Anthologia Graeca* 13.68.

5. Fußwaschung als Zeichenhandlung und als paradoxe Intervention

Die Fußwaschung Jesu reiht sich ein in viele andere Zeichenhandlungen Jesu:²⁴ der Jüngerkreis Jesu als solcher, der Zwölferkreis, die Mahlveranstaltungen Jesu, die die so genannte Tempelreinigung, der Einzug Jesu in Jerusalem auf einem Esel, das letzte Mahl Jesu mit seinen Jüngern. Jesus steht mit diesen Zeichenhandlungen in der Tradition der Propheten. Zeichenhandlungen in der biblischen Tradition begleiten, veranschaulichen und deuten die Verkündigung der Propheten bzw. Jesu. Auch die Fußwaschung Jesu ist in diese Tradition einzuordnen.

Ob wir von einer historisch sicheren Überlieferung ausgehen können – die Synoptiker kennen die Fußwaschung nicht²⁵ – kann hier nicht im Einzelnen dargestellt werden. Viele Argumente sprechen für die Annahme, dass Jesus beim letzten Abendmahl diese Zeichenhandlung bewusst verwendet hat.²⁶ Die Fußwaschung Jesu kann als historisch glaubwürdige Überlieferung gelten, die in der kompositionellen Deutung des Johannesevangeliums eine herausragende Bedeutung erhält. Dafür sprechen auch die synoptischen Analogien in Mk 10,45; Lk 12,37; 22,27; insbesondere die Kompatibilität mit dem zeichenhaften Tun Jesu.²⁷

Für die Auslegung der Fußwaschungserzählung im Johannesevangelium ist das genaue Profil dieser Zeichenhandlung von Interesse. Die

24 Vgl. hierzu grundlegend Heinz Schürmann, „Die Symbolhandlungen Jesu als eschatologische Erfüllungszichen. Eine Rückfrage nach dem historischen Jesus,“ in idem, *Jesus – Gestalt und Geheimnis. Gesammelte Beiträge* (Hg. Klaus Scholtissek; Paderborn: Bonifatius, 1994), 136–56.

25 Vgl. aber Lk 22,7–13.14–23.24–30; besonders 22,27.

26 Vgl. Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium*, 45–48; Hans-Josef Klauck, „Die Sakramente und der historische Jesus,“ in idem, *Gemeinde – Amt – Sakrament. Neutestamentliche Perspektiven* (Würzburg: Echter, 1989), 273–85, hier 276–79.

27 Das Johannesevangelium steht mit der Fußwaschungserzählung in inhaltlicher Kongruenz mit den synoptischen Evangelien. Im Lukasevangelium ist das Wort Jesu im Zusammenhang mit dem Abendmahl überliefert: „Er aber sprach zu ihnen: Die Könige herrschen über ihre Völker, und ihre Machthaber lassen sich Wohltäter nennen. Ihr aber nicht so! Sondern der Größte unter Euch soll sein wie der Jüngste, und der Vornehmste wie ein Diener (ὡς ὁ διακονῶν). Denn wer ist größer: der zu Tisch sitzt oder der dient (ὁ διακονῶν)? Ist's nicht der, der zu Tisch sitzt? Ich aber bin unter euch wie ein Diener (ὁ διακονῶν)“ (Lk 22,25–27). Der Evangelist Lukas überliefert hier Jesusworte zum Tischdienst Jesu: Jesus stellt sich als Tischdiener vor – auch wenn die Fußwaschung nicht genannt wird. Der Tischdienst Jesu hat die gleiche Provokationskraft: ‚Größe‘ und ‚Vornehmheit‘ werden dekonstruiert und neu bestimmt. Gleichzeitig verbindet Lukas Jesu Tischdienst mit der Herrscherkritik Jesu (vgl. Mk 10,35–45). Die markinische Parallele zu Lk 22,25 in Mk 10,42 („Ihr wisst, die als Herrscher gelten, halten ihre Völker nieder, und ihre Mächtigen tun ihnen Gewalt an“) verstärkt noch die Kritik Jesu am zeitgenössischen System der Macht.

johanneische Darstellung unterstreicht das Paradox. Die hoheitliche Rolle Jesu wird nachdrücklich betont und gleichzeitig durch seine konkrete Tat im Sinne der zeitgenössisch-kulturellen Plausibilität unterlaufen mit dem Ziel, die hoheitliche Rolle Jesu – in der Weise des Kontrastes zu kulturellen Plausibilitäten – neu zu bestimmen: Als Herr und Lehrer erweist Jesus sich gerade in der Fußwaschung, die als Sinnbild die erlösende Lebenshingabe Jesu veranschaulicht.

Zum besseren Verständnis der Fußwaschung Jesu soll im Folgenden eine neue Interpretationskategorie zur Anwendung kommen: Bietet sich der Gedanke der „paradoxen Intervention“ als ein Hilfsinstrument an für das Verständnis der Fußwaschung Jesu?

Der Begriff „paradoxe Intervention“ stammt aus der modernen systemischen Therapie. Eine paradoxe Intervention zielt darauf, eine paradoxe Kommunikation aufzulösen bzw. die Lösung von festen Mustern zu ermöglichen. Manchmal nennt man sie auch Symptomverschreibung, bei der das nicht erwünschte Verhalten gefördert wird, teils bis zur Übertreibung. Im engeren therapeutischen Kontext zielt die paradoxe Intervention z.B. darauf, persönliche Gefühls-, Verhaltens- und Reaktionsmuster zu erkennen und durch die Bewusstwerdung zu heilen.

Bei den Zeichenhandlungen Jesu geht es jedoch nicht um die übertriebene Veranschaulichung eines problematischen Verhaltens bzw. internalisierten Reaktionsmusters, sondern im Gegenteil um die veranschaulichende und verstärkende In-Szenierung der Botschaft und Sendung Jesu, die geprägte Verhaltens- und Denkmuster unterläuft und dekonstruiert. Dennoch kann von dem Gedanken der „paradoxen Intervention“ Licht auf die Fußwaschungserzählung fallen. Drei Beobachtungen sollen hier hervorgehoben werden.

- (1) Eine paradoxe Intervention lebt –wie die Fußwaschung Jesu – von der Konkretheit, Anschaulichkeit und Nachvollziehbarkeit.
- (2) Die paradoxe Intervention – wie die Fußwaschung Jesu – bricht mit einem Muster, mit einer allgemeinen oder gruppeninternen Kultur bzw. Plausibilität um eines Zieles willen.
- (3) Die paradoxe Intervention – wie die Fußwaschung Jesu – provoziert, irritiert, fordert heraus. Sie weist über sich hinaus, sie will gedeutet und verstanden werden.

In Anwendung auf die Fußwaschung Jesu heißt das: Jesus erweist sich in der Fußwaschung in neuer Weise als „Lehrer“ und „Herr“. Beim letzten Mahl mit seinen Jüngern vor seinem Tod und den eigenen Tod vor Augen durchbricht Jesus die verinnerlichten kulturellen Spielregeln seiner Zeit. Die banale

Fußwaschung vor Beginn der Mahlzeit wird durch sein paradoxes Handeln zu einer Provokation, die die Jünger Jesu – die in der Erzählung anwesenden Jünger Jesu ebenso wie die Hörer und Leser des Johannesevangeliums zu allen Zeiten – massiv herausfordert: Was geschieht hier? Warum handelt Jesus so?

Die Fußwaschung Jesu löst einen Such- und Verstehensprozess aus, der sich in dem Dialog zwischen Jesus und Petrus (Vv. 6–11) und in der anschließenden Ansprache Jesu (Vv. 12–17) niederschlägt. Wie der Evangelist Johannes die Fußwaschung Jesu verstanden wissen will, zeigt er zudem in der Komposition des 13. Kapitels (vgl. bes. 13,1) und in der Gesamtkomposition seines Evangeliums. Mit und in der Fußwaschung deutet Jesus selbst seinen Weg in den Tod als Anteilgabe an ihm, an seinem Leben, an seiner Lebensgemeinschaft mit dem Vater.

6. Die johanneische Interpretation

In der exegetischen Fachdiskussion gibt es einen deutlichen Trend, die zwei Deutungen der Fußwaschung Jesu, die christologisch-soteriologische (Vv. 6–11) und die ethische (Vv. 12–17) zu trennen bzw. sie gegenüberzustellen. Beide stünden in einer inhaltlichen und literarkritisch zu separierenden Spannung zueinander.²⁸ Der Wortlaut des Textes selbst liefert dazu keine überzeugenden Anhaltspunkte. Im Gegenteil: Die Komposition des Kapitels 13 und das in dieser Komposition erkennbare Interesse bzw. die Leserführung des Evangelisten sind erzählerisch und theologisch kohärent.²⁹ Im

28 So u.a. Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium*, 7; Michael Theobald, *Herrenworte im Johannesevangelium* (HBS 34; Freiburg: Herder, 2002), 130–38; Hartwig Thyen, „Johannes 13 und die ‚Kirchliche Redaktion‘ des vierten Evangeliums,“ in idem, *Studien zum Corpus Johanneum*, 29–41. (Selbst)Kritisch dazu Thyen, „Joh 13,1ff als Objekt literarkritischer Analysen,“ in *Studien zum Corpus Johanneum*, 591–94.

29 Zur johanneischen Ethik vgl. weiterführend Klaus Scholtissek, „Eine größere Liebe als diese hat niemand, als wenn einer sein Leben hingibt für seine Freunde“ (Joh 15,13). Die hellenistische Freundschaftsethik und das Johannesevangelium“ in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums. Das vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditionsgeschichtlicher Perspektive* (Hg. Jörg Frey & Udo Schnelle; WUNT 175; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 413–39; Jörg Frey, „Love Relations in the Fourth Gospel. Establishing a Semantic Network,“ in idem, *Herrlichkeit*, 739–65; *Rethinking the Ethics of John. „Implicit Ethics“ in the Johannine Writings* (Hg. Jan van der Watt & Ruben Zimmermann; WUNT 291; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); s.a. Volker Rabens, „Johannine Perspectives on Ethical Enabling in the Context of Stoic and Philonic Ethics,“ in *Rethinking the Ethics of John*, 114–39.

Folgenden werden fünf zentrale Anliegen des Evangelisten in Joh 13,1–30 hervorgehoben.

Deutung der Sendung Jesu

Das „Beispiel“, das Jesus in der Fußwaschung gibt, ist eine In-Szenierung seiner paradox erscheinenden Sendung: Jesus unterläuft die kulturelle Plausibilität und den Status Quo der griechisch-römischen Standesgesellschaft (vgl. 3.1.). Sein Dienst stellt die gewohnte Rollenzuweisung ‚auf den Kopf‘. Sein Dienst hat zugleich eine erheblich größere Reichweite als alle anderen üblichen sozialen Dienstleistungen. Seine Sendung zielt auf die Rettung des Menschen, auf die Gemeinschaft mit ihm und durch die Gemeinschaft mit ihm auf die ewige, unzerstörbare Gemeinschaft mit seinem Vater.

Deutung des Todes Jesu

Ausweislich der Gesamtkomposition des Johannesevangeliums und der Überschrift in 13,1 geht es dem Evangelisten im gesamten zweiten Hauptteil um die existenzielle Bewältigung und die theologische Deutung des Todes und der Auferstehung Jesu.³⁰ Das letzte Mahl Jesu mit „den Seinen“ (13,1) und hier besonders die Fußwaschung Jesu bildet dazu den Auftakt, das Präludium im engsten Kreis der Jünger – aus dem Judas noch ausscheidet: Sein von Jesus vorhergesagter Verrat führt zum Weggang aus dem Jüngerkreis in die „Nacht“ (13,30).

Jesus erweist sich angesichts des bevorstehenden Todes genauso souverän und hoheitsvoll wie in der gesamten Zeit seines öffentlichen Wirkens im Johannesevangelium. Freilich ist der drohende Tod Jesu insbesondere aus der Jüngerperspektive eine erhebliche Infragestellung der Botschaft Jesu und des Boten selbst. Wie kann es sein, dass Gottes Sohn von menschlichem Kalkül und menschlicher Willkür in den Tod gegeben wird? Widerspricht der von Menschen gemachte Tod Jesu nicht seiner Botschaft und Sendung? Welchen Sinn hat der Tod Jesu? Wie geht es nach dem Tod Jesu weiter?

Diese Fragen beantwortet der Evangelist konzentriert im zweiten Hauptteil seines Evangeliums, so sehr deutliche Spuren schon im ersten

30 Vgl. weiterführend Thomas Söding, „Kreuzerhöhung. Zur Deutung des Todes Jesu nach Johannes,“ *ZThK* 103 (2006): 2–25; Jörg Frey, „Die ‚theologia crucifixi‘ des Johannesevangeliums“ in idem, *Herrlichkeit*, 485–554 (Lit.); vgl. idem, „Edler Tod – wirksamer Tod – stellvertretender Tod – heilschaffender Tod. Zur narrativen und theologischen Deutung des Todes Jesu im Johannesevangeliums,“ in idem, *Herrlichkeit*, 555–84.

Hauptteil gelegt werden. Der zweite Hauptteil des Evangeliums wird geprägt von den Abschiedsreden, die von Abschied (der Name sagt es bereits) und zugleich von neuer Gegenwart Jesu handeln,³¹ von dem Prozess gegen Jesus, in dem Jesus sich in ironischer Rollenverkehrung als der wahre Richter erweist,³² und von den Osterbegegnungen, in denen der Auferstandene die Gemeinschaft mit den Jüngern erneuert und sie sendet.

In der Fußwaschungserzählung interpretiert der Evangelist den Tod Jesu nicht als Scheitern der Sendung Jesu, sondern als Aufgipfelung seines Lebensdienstes aus Liebe (vgl. 13,1). Die Fußwaschung setzt das Paradox der Hoheit Jesu im niedrigen Dienst in Szene. Hoheit und Niedrigkeit Jesu spiegeln sich in seinem ganzen Leben in der johanneischen Darstellung. Dieses Paradox liegt in der Linie der im Prolog hymnisch besungenen Inkarnation des Weltenschöpfers, des Logos, in menschliches Fleisch (vgl. 1,14) und wird im Prozess Jesu weiter ausgeführt.

Deutung des Abendmahles

Der zweite Hauptteil wird präludiert von dem letzten Mahl Jesu mit seinen Jüngern. Es ist bekannt, dass Johannes hier nicht das letzte Mahl mit den Einsetzungsgesten und -worten erzählt, sondern die Fußwaschung.³³ Die Fußwaschung tritt an die Stelle, an der die synoptischen Evangelien das letzte Mahl Jesu berichten³⁴ – nicht, weil Johannes das letzte Mahl nicht kannte oder es ablehnte (vgl. die Brotrede in Joh 6), sondern weil er mit der Fußwaschung Jesu das in der Gemeinde gefeierte Abendmahl Jesu interpretiert und der „feiernden Gemeinde eine Lehre erteilen (wollte), etwa in der gleichen Richtung wie Paulus: ‚Sooft ihr dieses Brot eßt und den Kelch trinkt, verkündet ihr den Tod des Herrn‘ (1 Kor 11,26), johanneisch gesprochen: die äußerste Liebe Jesu, der sich in den Tod gab, um euch Anteil an seinem Leben zu schenken (vgl. das Wort an Petrus 13,8b).“³⁵ So interpretiert der Evangelist in der Fußwaschungserzählung das in der Gemeinde gefeierte

31 Vgl. hierzu Klaus Scholtissek, „Abschied und neue Gegenwart. Exegetische und theologische Reflexionen zur johanneischen Abschiedsrede Joh 13,31–17,26,“ *ETHL* 75 (1999): 332–58.

32 Vgl. hierzu Klaus Scholtissek, „Ironie und Rollenwechsel im Johannesevangelium,“ *ZNW* 89 (1998): 235–55.

33 Vgl. Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium*, 38–53.

34 Zum Problem und zu Deutungsmöglichkeiten vgl. Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium*, 48–53.

35 Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium*, 52. „Damit wird die Fußwaschung nicht zu einem Symbol für die Eucharistie, aber in ihrem auf den Tod Jesu verweisenden Symbolgehalt zu einer Verständnishilfe für die Teilnehmer am eucharistischen Mahl.“

Abendmahl als Teilgabe Jesu an seiner erlösenden Lebenshingabe und als Anteilgabe an ihm.

Verpflichtung auf einen Liebesdienst nach dem Vorbild Jesu

Der in der Lebenshingabe gipfelnde Lebensweg Jesu und die Feier der Teilgabe an ihm als Frucht seiner Lebenshingabe verpflichten die Jünger Jesu, „seine Freunde“ (vgl. Joh 15,12–17): Sie werden verpflichtet auf einen innergemeindlichen Liebesdienst, der sich am Maßstab Jesu orientiert (13,15–17; vgl. 13,1.34–35; 15,12–14). Dazu ist die Fußwaschung ein anschauliches und zugleich normierendes „Beispiel“.³⁶

Das treibende Motiv für die Verhaltensaufforderung und Verpflichtung der Freunde Jesu ist die Liebe (13,1) in der konkreten Auslegung Jesu (13,2–17): Anders als bei Jesus trifft auf die Freunde Jesu in der Aufforderung Jesu, nach seinem „Beispiel“ zu handeln, primär nicht die Paradoxie von Hoheit und Niedrigkeit zu. Gleichwohl sollen auch sie mit einer kulturellen Plausibilität brechen: eine wiederholte und wechselseitige Verpflichtung zur Fußwaschung ist der griechisch-römischen Kultur zutiefst fremd. Diese Wiederholungen und Wechselseitigkeit einschließende Inpflichtnahme der Freunde Jesu ist eine bleibende Provokation *ad intra*, für die Jünger Jesu selbst (die, die die Füße anderer waschen, und die, die die Füße gewaschen bekommen), als auch *ad extra*, für die Außenstehenden, die durch dieses Verhalten nach dem „Beispiel“ Jesu erheblich angefragt werden.

Die johanneische Verpflichtung auf die gegenseitige Liebe ist zunächst eine innergemeindliche Verpflichtung. Dabei darf jedoch nicht übersehen werden, dass diese innergemeindlich praktizierte Liebe auf die Menschen zielt, die diese Liebe „sehen“ (13,35; vgl. 17,20–23). An der Liebe der Freunde Jesu untereinander soll die Welt erkennen, wie sehr sie selbst geliebt ist. Die Universalität der Liebe Gottes in seinem Sohn (vgl. 3,16!)³⁷ wird durch das johanneische Modell nicht aufgehoben oder eingegrenzt, sondern an

36 Das griechische Wort in V. 15: ὑπόδειγμα ist ein johanneisches Hapaxlegomenon. In der griechischsprachigen Literatur begegnet ὑπόδειγμα im Sinne des nachzueifernden ethischen Vorbilds (beispielsweise: Josephus *Bellum Judaicum* 1.374: „... das könnt ihr am eigenen Beispiel lernen: ...“; Polybios 3.17.8: „... indem er bald den Soldaten mit seinem Beispiel voranging ...“ (vgl. Livius 7.32.10–12); Polybios 15.20.5: „... um durch das Exempel (ὑπόδειγμα), das sie mit aufstellte, der Nachwelt eine eindruckliche Warnung zu erteilen, sich eines Besseren zu belehren.“

37 Vgl. weiterführend: Thomas Söding, „Er ist der Retter der Welt“ (Joh 4,42). Die Heilsuniversalität Jesu nach Johannes, in *Mittler und Befreier. Die christologische Dimension der Theologie* (hg. Christian Schaller, Michael Schulz & Rudolf Voderholzer; Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 219–32.

konkrete Subjekte gebunden – an jeden einzelnen Christen in der Gemeinde Jesu.

Die Inpflichtnahme der Freunde Jesu wird in 13,16 mit einer feierlich eingeleiteten Doppelregel begründet:

Amen, amen, ich sage euch: Der Knecht (δούλος) ist nicht größer als sein Herr (τοῦ κυρίου), noch ist der Gesandte größer als der Ihn Sendende (13,16).

Jesus betont hier erneut sein Herr-Sein und das entsprechende Knecht-Sein der Jünger Jesu. Das ist eine vor- wie nachösterliche Konstante. Ihr folgend gilt die Verpflichtung auf den Kyrios und seinen Willen. Verstärkt wird dieser Anspruch Jesu durch das grundlegende Sendungsprinzip bzw. -recht. Wie bei Jesus als dem Gesandten des Vaters gilt auch für die Gesandten Jesu. Sie folgen dem Auftrag des Sendenden rückhaltlos. Dem Tun des Willens des Sendenden verspricht Jesus zudem die Seligkeit: „Wenn ihr dieses wisst, selig seid ihr, wenn ihr dieses tut“ (3,17).

Aufnahme in die Gemeinschaft der Freunde Jesu, in die Gemeinschaft mit Jesus und mit seinem Vater

In der johanneischen Fußwaschungserzählung begegnen den Lesenden und Hörenden ekklesiologische Grundaussagen:³⁸ Dazu gehören die oben genannte Deutung der Feier des Abendmahls in der Gemeinde als gemeinsame Teilhabe am erlösenden Lebensdienst Jesu und die Verpflichtung auf den gegenseitigen Liebesdienst nach dem Vorbild Jesu. Zur Ekklesiologie der johanneischen Fußwaschungserzählung gehört noch eine weitere zentrale Aussage: der Verrat des Judas als Gegenbild eines Jüngers Jesu:

Amen, Amen, ich sage euch: Wer aufnimmt, wen (immer) ich senden werde, nimmt mich auf, wer aber mich aufnimmt, nimmt den auf, der mich gesandt hat (13,20).³⁹

³⁸ Vgl. hierzu auch Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us. Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001); Coloe, „Welcome into the Household of God: The Footwashing in John 13,“ *CBQ* 66 (2004): 400–15; Coloe, „Sources in the Shadows. John 13 and the Johannine Community,“ in *New Currents Through John. A Global Perspective* (hg. Francisco Lozada Jr. & Tom Thatcher; SBL. Resources for Biblical Studies 54; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 2006), 69–82.

³⁹ Vgl. Mt 10,40.

Die beiden dominierenden Verben sind „senden“ (πέμπω) und „aufnehmen“ (παραλαμβάνω): Eine gründliche Übersicht über den vollständigen Gebrauch des Wortes παραλαμβάνω im Johannesevangelium erweist sich dieses Verb als eine zentrale ekklesiologische Vokabel des Evangelisten:⁴⁰

Er kam in sein Eigenes (εἰς τὰ ἴδια) und die Seinen (οἱ ἱδιοὶ) nahmen ihn nicht auf (οὐ παρέλαβον) (Joh 1,11).

... und von jener Stunde an nahm sie der Jünger in sein Eigenes (εἰς τὰ ἴδια) auf (Joh 19,27).

Der Evangelist Johannes definiert die „Aufnahme“ durch die Seinen geradezu als das Sinnziel der Sendung Jesu. Dort, wo er „aufgenommen wird“, entsteht die Gemeinschaft der Freunde Jesu bzw. der Kinder Gottes. Seine Aufnahme bewirkt die Gemeinschaft mit ihm und mit seinem Vater.

Die Verse 13,16 und 13,20 sind zusammen zu sehen: „Zwischen den beiden Logien besteht eine Dialektik: Der Abgesandte ist nicht größer als der ihn Sendende, und doch partizipiert er auch an dessen Hoheit und Würde.“⁴¹ Auf seine Jünger bezogen heißt dies: sie haben Gemeinschaft mit Jesus und über ihn mit dem Vater, sie haben Teil an seiner vollmächtigen Sendung – sie haben Teil an der Hoheit Jesu aufgrund der von Jesu Sendung eröffneten und ermöglichten Gemeinschaft zwischen Vater und Sohn.

7. Diakonie als gegenkulturelle Praxis – eine Zusammenfassung

Die Diakonie Jesu

Auch wenn die Wortfamilie διακονέω, διάκονος, διακονία im Johannesevangelium nur selten vorkommt (vgl. 12,26), die Sendung Jesu lässt sich

⁴⁰ Vgl. weiterführend Klaus Scholtissek, „Kinder Gottes und Freunde Jesu. Beobachtungen zur johanneischen Ekklesiologie,“ in *Ekklesiologie des Neuen Testaments. Festschrift Karl Kertelge* (hg. Rainer Kampling & Thomas Söding; Freiburg: Herder, 1996), 184–211; Scholtissek, „Freundschaftsethik“; Scholtissek, *In ihm sein und bleiben. Die Sprache der Immanenz in den johanneischen Schriften* (HBS 21; Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2000); Boris Repschinski, „Freundschaft mit Jesus: Joh 15,12–17,“ in *Im Geist und in der Wahrheit. Studien zum Johannesevangelium und zur Offenbarung des Johannes sowie andere Beiträge. Festschrift für Martin Hasitschka* (hg. Konrad Huber & Boris Repschinski; NTA 52; Münster: Aschendorff, 2008), 155–67.

⁴¹ Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium*, 32.

als Diakonie verstehen. Ausweislich der Fußwaschungserzählung dient Jesu Botschaft sowie sein gesamtes Leben einschließlich seines Sterbens den Menschen, denen, die ihn „aufnehmen“. Durch seinen Lebensdienst begründet und ermöglicht Jesus Gemeinde, die Gemeinschaft der Freunde Jesu und der Kinder Gottes. Ohne diesen konkreten Dienst Jesu gibt es keine Gemeinde Jesu. Sie erwächst geradezu aus dem Lebensdienst Jesu, der in der Lebenshingabe gipfelt. Am Kreuz, unter dem Kreuz vollzieht sich ein idealtypischer gemeindegründender Akt. Jesus verweist, sendet seine Mutter zu dem Lieblingsjünger. Dieser „nimmt“ Maria „in sein Eigen auf“. Durch die Inpflichtnahme des Lieblingsjägers erfüllt sich die Evangeliumsregel aus 13,20. Am Kreuz werfen die Lesenden und Hörenden des Johannesevangeliums einen Blick auf die Urzelle der christlichen Gemeinde.

Die Erzählung von der Fußwaschung Jesu ist eine anschauliche In-Szenierung der Diakonie Jesu. Er durchbricht provokativ-zeichenhaft kulturelle Normen und Muster seiner Umwelt. Jesus entzieht sich selbst den bekannten sozialen Hierarchien mit den ihnen eigenen und sie dokumentierenden sozialen Dienstleistungen und stellt sie in der Fußwaschung in paradoxer Zuspitzung auf den Kopf. Mit dieser Zeichenhandlung deutet Jesus seinen Weg und das Ziel seiner Sendung. Er dient, um erlöstes Leben zu ermöglichen. Er dient auch und gerade in seinem Sterben, um Menschen durch seinen Dienst in die endgültige Gemeinschaft mit ihm und seinem Vater zu führen. Der Lebens-Dienst Jesu – und nur er – befreit aus der Verlorenheit des Menschen an „die Nacht“ (um die johanneische Metaphorik⁴² aufzugreifen; vgl. 13,30).

Die Diakonie Jesu verstehen

Die Absicht des Evangelisten, seine Leserführung und Leserlenkung, zielt insgesamt darauf, die Lesenden und Hörenden mit dem Weg Jesu, seinem Leben, Sterben und Auferstehen vertraut zu machen. Dabei richtet sich der Evangelist zunächst an die Christen selbst. Sie sollen noch tiefer in den Glauben hineinwachsen, sie sollen über vordergründige, vorläufige Deutungen zur Mitte der Sendung Jesu vorstoßen, ihn ‚verstehen‘. Indem der Evangelist seinen Christen vertiefend das Leben Jesu vor Augen führt, will er sie stärken, sie tiefer in der Gemeinde der Freunde Jesu verankern

42 Vgl. hierzu grundlegend Otto Schwankl, *Licht und Finsternis. Ein metaphorisches Paradigma in den johanneischen Schriften* (HBS 5; Freiburg: Herder, 1995); Jörg Frey, „Das Bild als Wirkungspotential. Ein Rezeptionsästhetischer Versuch zur Funktion der Brot-Metapher in Johannes 6“, in idem, *Herrlichkeit*, 381–407.

und sie ermächtigen, ihren Auftrag (vgl. 13,15: „Ein Beispiel habe ich euch gegeben ...“) zu leben.

Dazu gilt es, das Leben und Sterben Jesu, seinen Lebens-Dienst, besser „zu verstehen“, alles Vordergründige hin zur Mitte der Sendung Jesu zu überschreiten. Am Beispiel der Fußwaschungserzählung wird den Lesenden und Hörenden aller Zeiten dieser Verstehensprozess vor Augen geführt. Am Beispiel des Petrus werden mögliche Missverständnisse der Lesenden und Hörenden aufgedeckt und überwunden. Der Weg des Judas veranschaulicht ein (freilich genauer zu betrachtendes) Nichtverstehen bzw. Missverstehen der Sendung Jesu.

Die neue Diakonie der Christen

Der die Füße seiner Jünger waschende Jesus verpflichtet „die Seinen“ auf seine eigene Praxis. Seinem „Beispiel“ folgend sollen sie einander die Füße waschen (13,14–15). Der Logik und der konkreten Gestalt seines Dienstes folgend, werden die Jünger darauf verpflichtet, sich gegenseitig zu dienen. Nur so entsprechen sie dem erlösenden Dienst Jesu. Diesem Auftrag korrespondiert auch das einzige Jesuswort im Johannesevangelium, in dem das Wortfamilie *διακονέω*, *διάκονος*, *διακονία* vorkommt: „Wenn jemand mir dienen will, dann folge er mir nach, und wo ich bin, dort wird auch mein Diener sein. Wenn jemand mir dient, wird er den Vater ehren“ (12,26). Ziel des Dienstes der Jünger Jesu ist es, wie Jesus den Vater zu ehren, von ihm beauftragt und gesandt, dem Vater alle Ehre zu geben.

Es gibt drei Kennzeichen der neuen Diakonie der Christen in der Lesart des Johannesevangeliums: Reframing, innergemeindliche Diakonie und missionarische Diakonie.

(a) *Reframing*

Die Verpflichtung der Freunde Jesu auf den Lebensdienst Jesu beinhaltet das gesamte Wirken und die gesamte Verkündigung Jesu. In der Fußwaschung Jesu lenkt der Evangelist den Blick der Lesenden und Hörenden auf eine konkrete Praxis, eine soziale Dienstleistung, ein alltägliches Ritual. Dieses Ritual wird neu gedeutet. Hier setzt ein Reframing ein – eine Neubestimmung des normativen Rahmens. Kulturell festgeschriebene Rollen werden in Frage gestellt, durchbrochen und überholt bzw. in einen neuen Sinnhorizont gestellt. In der Gemeinde Jesu gelten im Unterschied zur sozialen Umwelt neue diakonische Regeln. Galt in der Umwelt der frühen Christen die Fußwaschung als eine soziale Dienstleistung, die eine bestimmte soziale Hierarchie dokumentiert und verstetigt, so wird die Fußwaschung durch

das „Beispiel“ Jesu zum Ausdruck einer neuen Diakonie. Fußwaschung nicht mehr als Ausdruck einer Gesellschaft, die von sozialer Unter- und Überordnung bestimmt wird, sondern als Zeichen einer Gemeinschaft, die sich wechselseitig dient: in den konkreten, notwendigen Alltagsvollzügen und in der unabschließbaren Aufgabe, den Lebensdienst Jesu in seiner ganzen Reichweite für sich selbst und für andere zu erschließen.

(b) *Innergemeindliche Diakonie und Vertiefung des Glaubens*

Im Sinne des Johannesevangeliums hat die christliche Gemeinde die Aufgabe, *sich untereinander zu dienen*. Das kann und muss in den scheinbar banalsten helfenden Lebenssituationen konkret werden: Maßstab für innergemeindliche Diakonie ist das normierende „Beispiel“ Jesu – nicht die jeweils gültigen Standes- oder Verhaltensregeln der zeitgenössischen Umwelt. Diese innergemeindliche Diakonie kann nicht von der Verkündigung des Evangeliums getrennt und gegebenenfalls an Dritte delegiert werden. Im Gegenteil: Die innergemeindliche Diakonie ist integraler Bestandteil der Verkündigung des Evangeliums. Worte ohne kongruente Taten gab es im Leben Jesu nicht, sie darf es auch nicht in der Gemeinde Jesu geben.

Positiv formuliert: innergemeindliche Diakonie verfügt über ein nicht zu unterschätzendes Gemeinschafts- und Erschließungspotential. Innergemeindliche Diakonie verbindet Menschen miteinander, verstärkt ihre Einbindung in die Gemeinde Jesu und hilft bei der Erschließung des Evangeliums Jesu Christi. Wie bei der Fußwaschung Jesu werden Fragen wach, deren Antworten Christen schrittweise und je neu voneinander lernen können: Die Frage des Petrus „Herr, Du willst mir die Füße waschen?“ und die Frage Jesu: „Versteht ihr, was ich euch getan habe?“ bleiben virulent, werden je neu gestellt und rufen zur Vertiefung des Glaubens und einer persönlichen Antwort.

(c) *Missionarische Diakonie*

Die neue Diakonie der Christen, die sich nicht an den kulturellen und sozialen Standards ihrer Umwelt orientiert, sondern am „Beispiel“ Jesu, hat eine starke Außenwirkung. Die gelebte Infragestellung und Neubestimmung des sozialen Zusammenlebens in der christlichen Gemeinde wird wahrgenommen und entfaltet die ihr innewohnende Provokation. Jede religiöse Überhöhung der staatlichen Ordnung (s. den zeitgenössischen römischen Kaiserkult), jede Gestalt einer auf Privilegien bzw. einer auf sozialer Herkunft beruhenden oder auf gewaltsam herbeigeführten Standesunterschieden beruhenden Sozialordnung wird von der Gemeinde Jesu zutiefst in Frage gestellt und delegitimiert. In der Gemeinschaft der

Jüngerinnen und Jünger Jesu gelten andere soziale Regeln – Urgrund der kontrastiven Ethik Jesu und der ihm Nachfolgenden ist nicht der Kontrast um des Kontrastes, sondern um seiner Botschaft willen, die nur so von Menschen gehört, gelebt und verstanden werden kann.

Es geht um die Identität und Strahlkraft des Evangeliums selbst. Die in der Sendung Jesu den „Seinen“ erwiesene Liebe, die in den Tod geht und ihn überwindet, gilt der ganzen Welt, dem Kosmos: „Denn also hat Gott die Welt geliebt, dass er seinen eingeborenen Sohn gab, damit alle, die an ihn glauben, nicht verloren werden, sondern das ewige Leben haben“ (3,16). Die Liebe Gottes zu seiner Schöpfung, zu dem vom Logos ins Leben gerufenen Kosmos (vgl. 1,1–3), will alle Menschen erreichen.⁴³ Die von Jesus gerufene, an ihn glaubende und von ihm gesandte Gemeinschaft der Kinder Gottes ist der konkrete Ort, in dem diese universale Liebe Gottes gelebt und veranschaulicht wird und ausstrahlt. So verkündigt sie die Botschaft Jesu an alle anderen Menschen, die am Beispiel der sich dienenden Christen ablesen können, wie sehr sie selbst geliebt sind.: Joh 17,20–23 spricht von der innigen Einheit der Christen und ihrem Zweck: „... damit die Welt glaube, dass du mich gesandt hast ... und die Welt erkenne, dass du mich gesandt hast und sie liebst, wie du mich liebst“ (Joh 17,20–23).

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43 Das Johannesevangelium kennt keine Prädestinationslehre; vgl. Frey, *Herrlichkeit*, 230–31.460–67.480.

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Part III

Imperial Ideology and Other Early Christian Texts

The Shepherd of Hermas and the Roman Empire

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1. Introduction

In the literature on the relation between early Christianity and the Roman Empire, the *Shepherd of Hermas* is often left aside.¹ Moreover, in the literature on the *Shepherd of Hermas*, this theme has not received ample treatment.² Much about the *Shepherd of Hermas* remains puzzling and is highly debated. It is therefore important to sum up the main assumptions that underlie this article. First, it will be assumed that the *Shepherd of Hermas* was written somewhere between the end of the first and the middle of the second century.³ Second, the work is situated in or

1 See, e.g., Michael Labahn and Jürgen Zangenberg, eds., *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und Römische Herrschaft. Vorträge auf der Ersten Konferenz der European Association for Biblical Studies* (TANZ 36; Tübingen: Francke, 2002), where there is no reference to the *Shepherd of Hermas* (yet several references to other writings of the Apostolic Fathers). Martin Meiser, "Das Christentum in Rom im Spiegel des ersten Clemensbriefes," in *Christians as a Religious Minority in a Multicultural City: Modes of Interaction and Identity Formation in Early Imperial Rome. Studies on the Basis of a Seminar at the Second Conference of the European Association for Biblical Studies (EABS) from July 8-12, 2001, in Rome* (eds. J. Zangenberg and M. Labahn; JSNTSup 243; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 139-56, refers to the *Shepherd of Hermas* several times (as the sole contributor to the volume), but does not say anything about Hermas's views on the Roman Empire. Allen Brent, *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order: Concepts and Images of Authority in Paganism and Early Christianity before the Age of Cyprian* (VCSup 45; Leiden: Brill, 1999) refers to the *Shepherd of Hermas*, but does not say anything about its views on the imperial cult. Adolf M. Ritter, "Kirche und Staat" im Denken des frühen Christentums: Texte und Kommentare zum Thema Religion und Politik in der Antike (TC 13; Bern: Peter Lang, 2005) does not refer to the *Shepherd of Hermas* at all.

2 For instance, in the commentaries on Hermas, Similitude 1 is interpreted primarily in terms of Hermas's attitude towards the world. See, e.g., Martin Dibelius, *Der Hirt des Hermas* (HNT; Die Apostolischen Väter 4; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1923), 550-53; Norbert Brox, *Der Hirt des Hermas* (KAV 7; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 283-89, esp. 283: "Die Christen und die Welt (Sim I 1-11)"; and Carolyn Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), 158: "This parable of the two cities [Sim. 1] is the author's clearest articulation of his view of the Christian's place in society."

3 For a dating of the text at the end of the first century, see, e.g., Patricia Cox Miller, "All the Words Were Frightful: Salvation by Dreams in the *Shepherd of Hermas*," VC 42 (1988): 327-38; repr. "Hermas and the Shepherd" in eadem, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994) and Harry O. Maier, *The Social Setting of the Ministry as Reflected in the Writings of Hermas, Clement and Ignatius* (Canadian

near Rome.⁴ Third, the book is considered to be written by one author (conventionally called Hermas), whether or not in different stages.⁵ The present article investigates Hermas's views on the desirable relation of the Christian community to the authorities. Living in the centre of the Roman world, the Christian Hermas (as the author identifies himself) must have experienced the impact of the empire on all aspects of sociocultural, economic, and political life.

2. Hermas and the Authorities

Similitude 1

Hermas's views on the relation between Christians and the authorities are most clearly expressed in Similitude 1. According to this parable, God's servants live in a foreign place (ξένη): their own city (πόλις), in which they will live, is far away from the city in which they live now (v. 1).⁶ In the present situation, they are under the power of another lord or master⁷ who expects them to obey his laws: "For the lord of this land rightly (δικαίως) says to you:

Corporation for Studies in Religion, Dissertations Series 1; Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1991), 55-58. For a dating in the first half of the second century, Dibelius, *Hirt des Hermas*, 422; Brox, *Hirt des Hermas*, 23-25 and Joseph Verheyden, "The *Shepherd of Hermas*," *ET* 117 no. 10 (2006): 397-401, 397; repr. in *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers* (ed. Paul Foster; London: T&T Clark, 2007). Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 20, argues that the text was probably written in a period of time between the end of the first century and the first half of the second century.

4 With, e.g., Brox, *Hirt des Hermas*, 22-23 and Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 18. Pace esp. Erik Peterson, "Kritische Analyse der fünften Vision des Hermas," in idem, *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis: Studien und Untersuchungen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1959), 271-84, esp. 275, 282. Peterson argued for an Eastern origin of Hermas – a minority position that has largely been abandoned.

5 See esp. Brox, *Hirt des Hermas*, 32-33 and Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 10. Pace esp. Stanislas Giet, *Hermas et les pasteurs: Les trois auteurs du Pasteur d'Hermas* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963). The idea that Hermas is the work of various authors, which has always been a minority position, has largely been abandoned. For the present article, the *Shepherd of Hermas* has been studied as a whole in its final redactional stage on the basis of the edition of Martin Leutzsch, "Hirt des Hermas," in *Papiasfragmente. Hirt des Hermas* (eds. Ulrich H. J. Körtner and Martin Leutzsch; SUC 3; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 105-497. The translations of the *Shepherd of Hermas* in this article are mine but have been inspired by those in Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*.

6 For ξένη, see also v. 6. For the contrast between the two πόλεις, see vv. 1-3, 5-6, 9.

7 Sim. 1.3: ὑπ' ἐξουσίαν ἐτέρου ... ὁ κύριος τῆς πόλεως ταύτης; v. 4: ὁ κύριος τῆς χώρας ταύτης; v. 6: ὁ δεσπότης τῆς πόλεως ταύτης.

either obey my laws, or move out of my land" (v. 4). Believers are exhorted to turn their minds towards their own city with its own law.⁸

There are four major exegetical problems: the meaning of the two cities, the lord, the laws, and the change of place. For the two cities, it has been argued that they represent Rome and the heavenly Jerusalem, the state and the church, earth and heaven, or the present world and the next world that is now represented by the church.⁹ It is unlikely that the present city is Rome, because the place where Christians live is not only designated as city (πόλις) but also as land (χώρα, v. 4).¹⁰ Most likely, the present world in which Christians live is meant. The Christians' own city is not to be interpreted as either the (future) world to come or the (present) church but as a combination of both: on the one hand, it is portrayed as a place "far away" (μακράν, v. 1) where believers "will dwell" (μέλλετε κατοικεῖν, v. 1); on the other hand, it is a place of "return" (ἐπανακάμψαι, vv. 2, 5; ἐπιδημήσης, v. 9). Therefore, it is probably the world to come, represented now by the Christian community.¹¹ The present city represents the present world and the other city the future world that Christians are already anticipating.

The "lord of this city" (v. 3), "lord of this land" (v. 4), or "master of this city" (v. 6) has been identified as various Roman emperors but also as the devil.¹² However, there is no evidence that a particular Roman emperor is meant¹³ and the devil is not mentioned here.¹⁴ Osiek concludes: "The identity of the lord of this city need not be decided between the Roman emperor and the

8 For the contrast between the two νόμοι, see Sim. 1.3-6.

9 For the first position, see, e.g., Theodor Zahn, *Der Hirt des Hermas* (Gotha: Perthes, 1868), 123-24. For the second, Robert Joly, *Hermas le Pasteur* (SC 53; Paris: Cerf, 1958), 212 n. 1 and Graydon Snyder, *The Shepherd of Hermas* (ApF[T] 6; Camden, NJ: Nelson, 1969), 94-95. For the third, Dibelius, *Hirt des Hermas*, 551-52 and Brox, *Hirt des Hermas*, 285. For the fourth, Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 158.

10 With Brox, *Hirt des Hermas*, 285 n. 10.

11 With Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 158 with n. 10.

12 For the former, see, e.g., Zahn, *Hirt des Hermas*, 125 (Domitian); Geoffrey M. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 41 (Domitian or Trajan) and Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 158: "it is not totally out of the question that memories of clashes between Roman Jews and the government under Tiberius and Claudius are invoked." Osiek's formulation is somewhat over-nuanced: is anything ever totally out of the question? For the latter, Dibelius, *Hirt des Hermas*, 551; Joly, *Hermas le Pasteur*, 210 n. 2 and Brox, *Hirt des Hermas*, 286.

13 See also, e.g., Dibelius, *Hirt des Hermas*, 551: "eine genaue Deutung [ist] weder nötig noch möglich. Wenn der Verf. [Verfasser] auf eine solche Wert legen würde, hätte er sicher den Hermas danach fragen und den Engel darauf antworten lassen."

14 For διάβολος, see Mand. 4.3.4, 6; 5.1.3; 7.2-3; 9.9, 11; 11.3, 17; 12.2.2; 12.4.6-7; 12.5.1-2, 4; 12.6.1-2, 4; Sim. 8.3.6.

devil ... strict correspondence of every character need not be found.”¹⁵ The lord or master probably represents the authorities in general. The point that is made is that “all things are strange and are under the power of *someone else*” (v. 3).

The law(s) of this city have been interpreted as the local (or Roman) laws, as the “commandments of the devil” (cf. Mand. 12.4.6-7) or as guiding principles in general.¹⁶ The laws are not associated with Roman laws: what is stated is that everything is under foreign authority (v. 3). The laws are not related to the devil either: the rules are not regarded as devilish. As a matter of fact, it is stated that the lord of the land *rightly* expects his subjects to obey his laws (v. 4).¹⁷ νόμος involves more than just general principles: the laws are those of the lord (vv. 3-4, 6) and of this city (v. 5). It is the laws of society that are meant.

Finally, there is the change of place, from the present city to the Christians’ own city. The perspective is partly eschatological. Eventually, Christians “will live in” (v. 1) or “return to” (vv. 2, 5, 9) their own city, but if they deny their own law and follow the law of the present city, they “will not be accepted” (οὐ μὴ παραδεχθήσῃ) and “will be excluded from” (ἐκκλεισθήσῃ ἅπ’) their city (v. 5). However, in other parts of the parable, the perspective seems to be different. It is stated that the lord of this city may summon his Christian citizens to “move out of” (ἐξέλθε ἐκ, v. 3) his city or “to leave” (ἐκχώρει, v. 4) his land. They may even be “thrown out by him” (ἐκβαλλόμενος ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ, v. 4). For this reason, they are urged to arrange no more for themselves than what is necessary to sustain themselves, so that they are always ready to leave: one is to be prepared, “so that, when the lord of this city wishes to throw you out (ἐκβαλεῖν) as opponent to his law, you will leave (ἐξέλθῃς) his city and go to (ἀπέλθῃς) your own city” (v. 6). The question is what is meant by this change of place. It has been argued that it refers to death or martyrdom,¹⁸ to expulsion,¹⁹ or to distancing oneself

15 Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 159.

16 For the first, see, e.g., Zahn, *Hirt des Hermas*, 124 (Roman laws) and Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 159. For the second, Brox, *Hirt des Hermas*, 286. For the third, Dibelius, *Hirt des Hermas*, 551: “die Lebens- und Gesellschaftsordnung dieser Welt überhaupt.”

17 See also, e.g., Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 159: “Hermas is more optimistic about the presence of God’s spirit in the world and in Christians than to imply here that the devil controls the world.” However, Osiek does not refer to Sim. 1.4 to substantiate this argument.

18 See, e.g., Martin Leutzsch, *Die Wahrnehmung sozialer Wirklichkeit im “Hirten des Hermas”* (FRLANT 150; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 202 and Joly, *Hermas le Pasteur*, 210. See also Zahn, *Hirt des Hermas*, 124-25, who thought of martyrdom as well as expulsion (see below).

19 See, e.g., Zahn, *Hirt des Hermas*, 124-25 and Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 159.

from society.²⁰ The key question is whether the change of place is meant in a literal or in a figurative sense. Clashes or persecutions do not seem to be implied.²¹ Hermas's rhetoric indicates that the Christians he has in view were more submissive to the government than he wanted them to be: their material possessions make them vulnerable for making too many concessions to the established order. Moreover, it is stated that the lord of the land rightly expects his subjects to obey him. Finally, it is not active resistance but passive dissidence that is envisioned. Moving from this city to the Christian's own city means in a figurative way that being obedient to God is more important than obeying the authorities on earth.

There is no sufficient evidence to interpret the parable from a specific historical background. Furthermore, the meaning of the parable is not dependent on its possible historical setting. The question Hermas addresses concerns the relation of Christians to the worldly authorities (whatever authorities these may be). It is reasonable to assume that the overall context is that of the Roman Empire, but details about the exact historical background of the parable are not given.

A Comparison with Some Other Early Christian Writings

A question that arises is where Hermas stands in comparison to the various attitudes towards the authorities in other early Christian writings. We will address two elementary questions. The first question concerns Hermas's views on the relation between the power of the government and the power of God. The second question regards Hermas's position in the spectrum varying between submission and revolution.

In the New Testament, the Evangelists contrast the reign of God (or Jesus) with the reign of the emperor.²² This contrast is generally understood in a dualistic and apologetic way. The two reigns would be portrayed as two powers that exist side by side. It would allow Christians to present

20 See esp. Dibelius, *Hirt des Hermas*, 552: "paktiere mit der Welt, oder trenne dich von ihr"; and Brox, *Hirt des Hermas*, 287: "Beendigung bzw. Anfang einer Zugehörigkeit bzw. ... Übergang von der einen Zugehörigkeit zur anderen."

21 See also, e.g., Dibelius, *Hirt des Hermas*, 552: "Es ist ... gar nicht ausgemacht, daß der Verf. [Verfasser] hier immer oder zunächst an Zusammenstöße mit dem Staat denkt ... Die Gefahr für die Christen besteht ja nach 4 [Sim. 1.4] nicht in Feigheit während der Verfolgung, sondern in allzu engem Zusammenhang mit der Welt."

22 See esp. Matt. 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25 and John 18:36.

themselves as citizens of two worlds and not as enemies of the authorities.²³ Other scholars, however, reject a dualistic and apologetic reading and argue that the power of the emperor is understood to be subordinate to the power of the Lord who rules both reigns.²⁴ It seems that somehow Hermas would have agreed with both positions. His attitude appears to be a combination of the two: Christians are to be loyal to their authorities and to be obedient to God. In other words, render to Caesar what is Caesar's and render to God what is God's, yet in conflicting situations obey God more than humans.²⁵ The rationale behind these views may be found in Mand. 12.4.2, where it is stated that God placed his creation under human dominion.

Hermas takes a middle position between submission and (near-)revolution. At the one end of the spectrum are *1 Peter* and *Titus*. It has been argued that *1 Peter* 2-3 and *Titus* 3:1 call for an unconditional and uncritical submissiveness to Gentile power.²⁶ This does not count for Hermas. For him, Christians are sovereign to the authorities,²⁷ yet are to face the reality of everyday life. As long as their obligations to the authorities are not in

23 See, e.g., Brian A. Mastin, "The Imperial Cult and the Ascription of the Title Θεός to Jesus (John XX.28)," *StEv* 6 = TU 112 (1973): 352-65, 363 and Hanns C. Brennecke, "An fidelis ad militiam converti possit? [Tertullian, de idolatria 19,1] Frühchristliches Bekenntnis und Militärdienst im Widerspruch?" in *Die Weltlichkeit des Glaubens in der Alten Kirche. Festschrift für Ulrich Wickert zum siebzigsten Geburtstag* (eds. Dietmar Wyrwa, Barbara Aland, and Christoph Schäublin; BZNW 85; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 45-100, 49-50.

24 See, e.g., Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (NovTSup 14; Leiden: Brill, 1967), 64; Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium. II. Teil. Kommentar zu Kap. 8,27-16,20* (HTK 2; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1977), 227-28 and Lance B. Richey, *Roman Imperial Ideology and the Gospel of John* (CBQ MS 43; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2007), 157-66.

25 For the former, cf. Matt. 22:21; Mark 12:17; and Luke 20:25. For the latter, Acts 5:29. Hermas does not use the same or similar terminology.

26 Lauri Thurén, "Jeremiah 27 and Civil Obedience in *1 Peter*," in *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und Römische Herrschaft. Vorträge auf der Ersten Konferenz der European Association for Biblical Studies* (eds. Michael Labahn and Jürgen Zangenberg; TANZ 36; Tübingen: Francke, 2002), 215-28, 215 with n. 1, 226. See also *1. Clement* 60.2-61.2, where the author prays for the authorities on earth and expects Christians to submit themselves to them, because God has given them the power to rule. With Meiser, *Christentum in Rom*, 143 n. 24, 154, who rightly reject the thesis of Tassilo Schmitt, *Paroikie und Oikoumene: Sozial- und mentalitätsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum 1. Clemensbrief* (BZNW 110; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 40-60, that *1 Clement* 27 60-61 would not be about the (political) authorities but about the leaders of the Church.

27 For a similar conclusion concerning Herm. Sim. 1, see Eckhard Plümacher, *Identitätsverlust und Identitätsgewinn: Studien zum Verhältnis von kaiserzeitlicher Stadt und frühem Christentum* (BTSt 11; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1987), 46: "ἡ γὰρ πόλις ὑμῶν μακράν ἐστὶν ἀπὸ τῆς πόλεως ταύτης, heißt es im Pastor Hermas ... Wer hier heimisch wurde, war von allem Fixiertsein auf die Polis frei und hatte ... für das, was in der Polis von jedermann sonst bewundert wurde, nur noch souveräne Verachtung übrig." Plümacher does not go more deeply into Hermas's views on

conflict with their obligations to God, there is no problem. If a conflict occurs, they are to choose God, but they should not enter into a conflict with the establishment. Obedience is to a certain extent based on free choice.²⁸ Hermas's attitude may be summarized as conditional, critical obedience. The example of Hermas shows that such an attitude is not to be regarded as anachronistic in early Christianity.²⁹ Hermas's attitude resembles that of Justin Martyr. According to Justin Martyr, Christians (should) acknowledge the kings and rulers of the earth, worship God alone, and rely on the Last Judgment when the government does not pay regard to them.³⁰ At the other end of the spectrum stands the *Book of Revelation*. It has been contended that this writing is almost a call to revolution.³¹ Unlike *Revelation*, the *Shepherd of Hermas* is not a call to subvert or even to change the status quo. Moreover, in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, different than in *Revelation*,

the relation of the Christian community to the authorities, or on the identity of the community in relation to the Roman Empire.

28 Cf. Norbert Brox, *Der erste Petrusbrief* (EKK 21; Zürich: Benzinger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1979), 124, who argued this for 1 Peter.

29 Pace Thurén, "Civil Obedience," 223-24.

30 Justin Martyr has explained the saying "give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" as follows: "Whence, while we worship only God we serve you joyfully in other respects, acknowledging you as kings and rulers within the human sphere and we pray that you are found to have prudent discernment along with the kingly power. And if you take no heed of our praying and putting everything in the open we will not be harmed at all; but rather we believe and have been convinced that each of you will pay penalties in eternal fire according to the worth of his actions..." (ὅθεν θεὸν μὲν μόνον προσκυνοῦμεν, ὑμῖν δὲ πρὸς τὰ ἄλλα χαίροντες ὑπηρετοῦμεν, βασιλεῖς καὶ ἄρχοντας ἀνθρώπων ὁμολογοῦντες καὶ εὐχόμενοι μετὰ τῆς βασιλικῆς δυνάμεως καὶ σώφρονα τὸν λογισμὸν ἔχοντας ὑμᾶς εὐρεθῆναι. εἰ δὲ καὶ ἡμῶν εὐχομένων καὶ πάντα εἰς φανερόν τιθέντων ἀφροντιστήσετε, οὐδὲν ἡμεῖς βλαβησόμεθα, πιστεύοντες μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ πεπεισμένοι κατ' ἀξίαν τῶν πράξεων ἕκαστον πίσει διὰ πυρὸς αἰωνίου δίκας...) Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 17.3-4 (trans. and eds. Denis Minns and Paul Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr. Apologies*; OECT; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009, 120-21).

31 See, e.g., Adela Y. Collins, "Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979* (ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 729-49, 749: "Revelation's call for vengeance and the possibility of the book's function as an outlet for envy give the book a tremendous potential for real psychological and social evil... Revelation limits vengeance and envy to the imagination and clearly rules out violent deeds." Cf. Henk Jan de Jonge, "The Apocalypse of John and the Imperial Cult," in *Kykeon: Studies in Honour of H. S. Versnel* (eds. Herman F. J. Horstmanshoff et al.; Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 142; Leiden: Brill 2002), 127-41 who argues that *Revelation* fulminates against the emperor cult and is strongly opposed to the Roman authorities but is not a call to revolution.

the “beast” does not stand for the worshipped emperor (Vis. 4).³² Hermas’s attitude towards the authorities is not so much characterized by hostility as by indifference.

3. Pragmatism and Realism

Hermas’s critical stance with regard to the authorities is quite moderate. Hermas is not anti-imperialistic: the writing does not oppose the expansionism of the Roman Empire. A feasible explanation for this is that the text was written in or nearby the political centre of the Roman Empire and not in a conquered province. This setting may explain Hermas’s moderate views. Perhaps the author is somewhat reticent. What follows will address the question whether Hermas’s stance is a purposeful tactical move, or due to more pragmatic reasons.

A first reason may be the fear of persecutions. In Hermas, persecutions are a recurring theme. The question that is relevant here is whether this theme refers to a situation of the past or of Hermas’s time. On the one hand, there are some indications that severe persecutions belonged to the past. A key passage is Vis. 3.1.9. In this vision, the church in the form of a woman does not allow Hermas to sit on her right side. She explains that this side is for those who have suffered for the name of the Lord.³³ When Hermas asks her what they have endured, she answers: “whips, prisons, severe torments, crosses, and wild animals”.³⁴ The fact that Hermas asks for further explanation seems to indicate that the author and his addressees were not entirely familiar with these forms of persecutions and did not experience these things personally.³⁵ On the other hand, the threat of persecutions appears to be an actuality. The recurring theme of the “(great) tribulation to

32 For the interpretation of the beast in *Revelation* as the worshipped emperor, see, e.g., Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte, “To Worship the Beast: The Revelation of John and the Imperial Cult in Asia Minor,” in *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und Römische Herrschaft. Vorträge auf der Ersten Konferenz der European Association for Biblical Studies* (eds. Michael Labahn and Jürgen Zangenberg; TANZ 36; Tübingen: Francke, 2002), 239–59.

33 Probably the name of God is meant, cf. Sim. 9.28.6. With Brox, *Hirt des Hermas*, 115. Pace Dibelius, *Hirt des Hermas*, 457.

34 Vis. 3.2.1: ὑπήνεγκαν [...] μάστιγας, φυλακάς, θλίψεις μεγάλας, σταυρούς, θηρία.

35 Pace Brox, *Hirt des Hermas*, 473: “Christenverfolgung und Martyrium sind für die Kirche des H [Hermas] zweifellos geläufig und aktuell ... [474] Die Aktualität von Verfolgungen ist also sicher.”

come" might well refer to the threat of persecutions.³⁶ Moreover, the "right side", where Hermas is not allowed to sit, is reserved not only for those who suffered in the past but for "anyone who suffers for the name".³⁷ The wording indicates that the suffering is not just a past remembrance but an actual situation. For Hermas, severe persecutions belong to the past, but suppression of Christians and the possibility of an outbreak of violence against Christians are current affairs. Caution was called for, especially for Christians who lived in or near the centre of Roman political power.

A second explanation may be that Hermas values good relations with the political system for economic reasons. Critique on Christians who lose themselves in business affairs is an important issue in the *Shepherd of*

36 See Vis. 2.2.7-8; 2.3.4; 3.2.1; 3.6.5; Sim. 8.3.7; 9.21.3, where θλίψις refers to (the threat of) persecutions. In Vis. 4, the meaning of θλίψις is less certain. In this vision, Hermas sees a beast "as type of the coming tribulation" (εἰς τύπον τῆς θλίψεως τῆς ἐπερχομένης, 4.1.1; τύπος ἐστὶν θλίψεως τῆς μελλούσης τῆς μεγάλης, 4.2.5; τύπον τῆς θλίψεως τῆς ἐρχομένης μεγάλης, 4.3.6); as "a great tribulation" (μεγάλαν θλίψιν, 4.2.4) that Hermas manages to escape and that all God's elect can escape if they are converted (4.2.5; 4.3.6). θλίψις has eschatological connotations here, but its exact meaning remains uncertain. Pace Marco Frenschkowski, "Vision als Imagination: Beobachtungen zum differenzierten Wirklichkeitsanspruch frühchristlicher Visionsliteratur," in *Fremde Wirklichkeiten: Literarische Phantastik und antike Literatur* (eds. Nicola Hömke and Manuel Baumbach; Kalliope 6; Heidelberg: Winter, 2006), 339-66, 351: "Erst in einem zweiten Schritt wird die Begegnung [with the monster] zur Allegorie für die bevorstehende Christenverfolgung." Pace Susan R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 105 and 131 n. 26 (on Vis. 4.1.5-9), who suggests that the coming tribulation refers to the power of the demonic. And pace Erik Peterson, "Die Begegnung mit dem Ungeheuer: Hermas, Visio IV," VC 8 (1954): 52-71; repr. in idem. *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis: Studien und Untersuchungen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1959); Angelo P. O'Hagan, "The Great Tribulation to Come in the *Pastor of Hermas*," StPatr 4 = TU 79 (1961): 305-11, esp. 307, who have both argued that the term refers to gehenna. See the critique in Brox, *Hirt des Hermas*, 168, 176 and Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 95. See esp. Richard J. Bauckham, "The Great Tribulation in the *Shepherd of Hermas*," JTS 25 (1974): 27-40, 32, who interprets the coming great tribulation as "an impending persecution which he [Hermas] understands as part of a larger eschatological event." There is not sufficient evidence to link the (threat) of persecutions with the persecutions of Christians under a particular Roman emperor. With Brox, *Hirt des Hermas*, 474: "die Angaben des PH [Pastor Hermas] bleiben absolut vage und unzureichend, wenn man aus ihnen bestimmtere Auskünfte über historische Daten gewinnen will." Pace, among others, Zahn, *Hirt des Hermas*, 125 (persecutions under Domitian); Dibelius, *Hirt des Hermas*, 422 and Peter Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten* (2d ed.; WUNT 2.18; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 188 (both: under Trajan); Anton Hilhorst, "Hermas," RAC 14 (1988): 682-701, 689 (under Trajan and Hadrian) and Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 94-95 (memory of the Neronian persecutions). As Brox, *Hirt des Hermas*, p. 474, rightly phrases, persecution in the sense of oppression was in early Christianity – so to say – omnipresent.

37 Vis. 3.2.1: ὅς ἐάν πάθῃ διὰ τὸ ὄνομα.

Hermas, but making money or accumulating wealth is not denounced.³⁸ On the contrary, wealth is regarded as something positive: it comes from God and enables people to support the needy.³⁹ In order to make money, Christians have to participate in the socio-economic system. Within this setting, it is advantageous to appear as loyal citizens.

A third motive may be that *Hermas* does not want to put people off for missionary reasons.⁴⁰ *Hermas* envisions mission among outsiders.⁴¹ Social interactions with outsiders may ask for compromises with the establishment. Each of these three reasons suggests that *Hermas*'s stance in relation to the authorities may be a tactical move that aims at good (or at least neutral) relations with the government in favor of the Christian community.⁴² However, there are two major objections to this line of reasoning. First, if *Hermas* really wants to be careful, why then does he dare to question the emperor cult (as will be shown in the next paragraph)? *Hermas* does not appear to be very anxious. Second, in the Roman Empire, criticizing the authorities and being a loyal citizen were not per se regarded as mutually exclusive. As a matter of fact, several prominent Roman citizens did openly criticize the authorities. A well-known example is Seneca, who ridiculed the emperor.⁴³ Perhaps *Hermas* does not want his work or the Christian community to come across as anti-Roman; but rather than a tactical reason there may well have been a more pragmatic reason for him not to reject the status quo. He may well have realized that there was no point in standing up to the authorities because the small Christian minority was powerless to change the political situation.

38 For *Hermas*'s critique on being over-involved in business affairs, see, e.g., Mand. 6.2.5 (ἐπιθυμία πράξεων πολλῶν). See Carolyn Osiek, *Rich and Poor in the Shepherd of Hermas: An Exegetical-Social Investigation* (CBQ MS 15; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1983), esp. 41-44.

39 Sim. 1.9.

40 For this motive, see Werner G. Kümmel, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (17th ed.; Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1973), 131, on Acts 25:8.

41 Vis. 3.5-4; 3.7-3; Sim. 8.3.2; 9.17.1-4.

42 For this motive in relation to early Christianity, see Wolfgang Schrage, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments* (4th ed.; GNT 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 13; and Jost Eckert, "Das Imperium Romanum in Neuen Testament: Ein Beitrag zum Thema 'Kirche und Gesellschaft,'" *TTZ* 96 (1987): 253-71, 266.

43 Seneca, the *Pumpkinification of the Divine Claudius* 8.3 (ed. Allan A. Lund, *L. Annaeus Seneca, Apocolocyntosis Divi Claudii*; WKLGS; Heidelberg: Winter, 1994, 42): "he [Claudius] wants to become a god: is he not satisfied that he has a temple in Britain, that the barbarians worship him and consider him to be a god...?" (*deus fieri vult: parum est quod templum in Britannia habet, quod <hunc> nunc barbari colunt et ut deum orant...?*).

4. Hermas and the Emperor Cult

In the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the emperor cult is not explicitly mentioned. Nevertheless, there are some indications that the veneration of the emperor is rejected. Mand. 4.1.9 criticizes a Christian “who does things similar to what pagans do”. Most likely, this refers to idolatry.⁴⁴ Sim. 9.21.3 criticizes believers who are double-minded: when they hear of tribulation, they become idolaters – because of their cowardice – and they are ashamed of the name of their Lord.⁴⁵ It may well be that the idolatry that is criticized includes the veneration of the emperor.⁴⁶

The veneration of the emperor is rejected in yet four other ways. First, for Hermas, the power of the emperor is subordinate to the power of God. God has all power.⁴⁷ God is the Almighty.⁴⁸ Creation is sustained by God’s Son.⁴⁹ God’s power is superior to all other dominions. Second, Hermas’s focus is on the east (that is, the divine) and not on the west (that is, the emperor). In Vision 1.4.1–3, the church in the form of a woman, sitting in a chair, is carried eastward. For Hermas, everything revolves around the Church.⁵⁰ She is represented here as a woman who sits in a chair: the chair emphasizes her authority. The east traditionally represents the origin of the manifestation of the divine.⁵¹ Perhaps there is something to be said for the idea that the orientation towards the east challenges the authority

44 Mand. 4.1.9: “the one who does things similar to what pagans do, commits adultery” (ὁς ἂν τὰ ὁμοιώματα ποιῇ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, μοιχᾷται). Adultery probably involves idolatry. See, e.g., Jer. 5:7 (eds. Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart, *Septuaginta: Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*; 2 vols. in one; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006, 2: 664): “your sons have left me and have sworn to non-gods ... they have committed adultery” (οἱ υἱοὶ σου ἐγκατέλιπόν με καὶ ὤμνουν ἐν τοῖς οὐκ οὐσιν θεοῖς ... ἐμοιχῶντο). With Dibelius, *Hirt des Hermas*, 507; Brox, *Hirt des Hermas*, 208 and Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 112 n. 17.

45 Sim. 9.21.3: οἱ διψυχοι, ὅταν θλίψιν ἀκούσωσι, διὰ τὴν δειλίαν αὐτῶν εἰδωλολατροῦσι καὶ το ὄνομα ἐπαισχύνονται τοῦ κυρίου αὐτῶν.

46 With Leutzsch, *Wahrnehmung sozialer Wirklichkeit*, 79, 213.

47 Sim. 5.7.3: αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἐστὶν πᾶσα ἡ ἐξουσία. See also Sim. 9.23.4: “God our Lord is the ruler of all and has power over all his creation” (ὁ θεὸς καὶ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν ὁ πάντων κυριεύων καὶ ἔχων πάσης τῆς κτίσεως αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐξουσίαν).

48 Vis. 3.3.5: παντοκράτωρ. Cf. Sim. 5.7.4, where the reading *omnipotens* (L') is probably secondary.

49 Sim. 9.14.5: πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ βαστάζεται. God’s Son is the foundation of all creation. See also Brox, *Hirt des Hermas*, 427–28.

50 See especially the tower image, representing the Church, in Vis. 3 and Sim. 9.

51 With Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 50, who points to the fact that the congregation in most early Christian churches faced east (just as most temples did, including the one in Jerusalem).

of the Roman emperor.⁵² Third, Hermas expects the final defeat of the empire. In Vision 1.3.4, it is predicted that God will eventually alter the heavens, mountains, hills, and seas and will level everything for his elect.⁵³ God's kingdom will come.⁵⁴ The established order will be replaced. Finally, Hermas plays on the idea of an apotheosis for Christians. Hermas does not envision a resurrection of the dead, a transformation of the dead into angels, or an ascension of the soul to heaven, but a continued existence of believers as members of the everlasting Christian community.⁵⁵ Rhoda's transferral from earth to heaven in the opening scene of the *Shepherd of Hermas* is described in similar terms as the apotheosis of Roman emperors like Romulus, Caesar, and Augustus in Roman literature.⁵⁶ Hermas's use of

52 Pace Zahn, *Hirt des Hermas*, 286-87 n. 2, who argued that the passages points to "die morgenländische Geburtsstätte der Kirche."

53 Vis. 1.3.4: ὁ θεὸς [...] ἰδοὺ μεθιστάνει τοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ τὰ ὄρη καὶ τοὺς βουνούς καὶ τὰς θαλάσσας, καὶ πάντα ὁμαλὰ γίνεται τοῖς ἐκλεκτοῖς αὐτοῦ.

54 For the Kingdom of God, see especially Sim. 9.12.3-5, 8; 9.13.2; 9.15.2-3; 9.16.2-4; 9.20.2-3; 9.29.2 (all using the term ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ); and 9.31.2 (*dei regnum*).

55 For the first position, see, e.g., Joly, *Hermas le Pasteur*, 241 n. 3; Ton H. C. van Eijk, *La résurrection des morts chez les Pères apostoliques* (ThH 25; Paris: Beauchesne, 1974), 87, 95; Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Future Hope in Early Christianity* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 82 and Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 181. For the second, Kirsopp Lake, "The Shepherd of Hermas," in *The Shepherd of Hermas. The Martyrdom of Polycarp. The Epistle to Diognetus* (vol. 2 of *The Apostolic Fathers*; 2 vols.; ed. Kirsopp Lake; LCL; 6th ed.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 1-305, 21. For the third, Lage Pernveden, *The Concept of the Church in the Shepherd of Hermas* (STL 27; Lund: Gleerup, 1966), 273. For the fourth, Mark R. C. Grundeken, "Resurrection of the Dead in the *Shepherd of Hermas*: A Matter of Dispute," in *Resurrection of the Dead: Biblical Traditions in Dialogue* (eds. Geert Van Oyen and Tom Shepherd; BETL 249; Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 403-16.

56 For Romulus, see, e.g., Livy, *History of Rome* 1.16.1 (Foster, LCL, 56, 58): "from that moment Romulus was no longer on earth" (*nec deinde in terris Romulus fuit*) and v. 3: "then, when a few had taken the initiative, they all hailed Romulus as a god and as a son of god, the king and father of the city of Rome" (*deinde, a paucis initio facto, deum deo natum, regem parentemque urbis Romanae salvere universi Romulum iubent*). See also Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 14.805-852 (Miller and Goold, LCL, 356, 358, 360). First, Romulus is taken from earth to heaven (*ablatus terris inponere caelo*, line 811) and is designated as the god Quirinus (lines 828, 834, 836, 851). Then, his wife Hersilia is taken up by a star to heaven (lines 846-848) and joins her husband as the goddess (*dea*) Hora (line 851). Similarities with Hermas, Vis. 1, include the Roman context (*urbs Romana*, Livy, 1.16.3; Πῶμη, Vis. 1.1.1), the heavenly destination (*caelum*, Ovid, 811; οὐρανός, Vis. 1.1.4), the transferral (*ablatus*, Ovid, 811; ἀνελήμφθην, Vis. 1.1.5), the designation of the transferral as a reward (*praemia*, Ovid, 14.810; μισθός, Sim. 5.6.7) and the term goddess (*dea*, Ovid, 851; θεά, Vis. 1.1.7). The similarities are not strong enough to assume any literary dependence, but it is fair enough to conclude that Hermas uses apotheosis terminology. For Julius Caesar, see, e.g., inscription 2628 in *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 9, 246: "to the Genius of the divine Julius, father of the fatherland, whom the senate and the people of Rome have reckoned among the gods" (*Genio dei Iuli parentis patriae quem senatus populusque Romanus in deorum numerum*

apotheosis terminology with regard to ordinary humans, not exclusively for the emperor and other highly placed persons, explicitly goes against the claims related to the emperor cult.⁵⁷ Thus Hermas's views are at odds with imperial ideology, which regarded the emperor's reign as divinely sanctioned.⁵⁸ It seems to be justified to conclude that Hermas did not accept the veneration of the emperor.

It is important to note that Hermas does not explicitly criticize Christians for participating in the emperor cult. In the *Shepherd of Hermas*, believers are criticized for many things, but not for being venerators of the emperor. Hermas's critique is more a warning than a condemnation of an actual practice among Christians. As such, the function of the critique on the veneration of the emperor is to affirm and strengthen the identity of the Christian Church.⁵⁹

rettulit). For Caesar Augustus, see, e.g., one of the various calendars s.v. 17 September A.D. 14 in *Inscriptiones Italiae* 13.2, 510: "holiday by decree of the senate, because on that day heavenly honors have been decreed to Divus Augustus by the senate", *fer(iae) ex s(enatus) c(onsulto), q(uod) e(o) d(ie) divo Augusto honores caelestes a senatu decreti*. See also Velleius Paterculus, *Historiae Romanae* 2.124.3 (ed. Frederick W. Shipley, LCL, 312-13): "after heaven had claimed his father [Augustus], and human honors had been paid to his body as divine honors were paid to his soul..." (*post redditum caelo patrem et corpus eius humanis honoribus, numen divinis honoratum...*). All three examples include two elements: the ascension from earth to heaven and the designation of one's divine or celestial status. Seneca's satire the *Pumpkinification of the Divine Claudius* (ed. Lund, 36, 40, 42) on Claudius also includes these two elements: Claudius's ascension from earth to heaven (*in terris ... in caelo*, 5.1) and his wish to become a god (*deus*, 8.1-3). These two elements are also found in Hermas, Vis. 1.

57 For the idea that in Greco-Roman thought an apotheosis was considered to be reserved for emperors and highly placed persons, see, e.g., Peter G. Bolt, "Life, Death and the Afterlife in the Greco-Roman World," in *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message in the New Testament* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 51-79, 77.

58 See, e.g., Seneca, *On Clemency* 1.1.2 (ed. Susanna Morton Braund, *Seneca. De Clementia*; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009, 94): "is it not that I [Nero] of all mortals have found favor and have been chosen to serve on earth as representative of the gods?" (*egone ex omnibus mortalibus placui electusque sum, qui in terris deorum uice fungerer?*). See further, e.g., Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading* (JSNTSup 204; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 39-43.

59 For a similar conclusion on the function of Christian polemics against the emperor cult, yet not with regard to the *Shepherd of Hermas*, but to the book of *Revelation*, see Henk Jan de Jonge, "The Function of Religious Polemics: The Case of the *Revelation* of John versus the Imperial Cult," in *Religious Polemics in Context* (eds. Theo L. Hetteema, Arie van der Kooij, and J. A. M. Snoek; STAR 11; Assen: Royal van Gorcum, 2004), 276-90, 289.

5. Concluding Remarks

Summing up, we may conclude that Hermas's views on the authorities are not hostile but quite moderate. It is stated that the lord of the world in which Christians live rightly expects them to obey his laws and that confrontations should be avoided (Sim. 1.4-6). Hermas does not envision active resistance but passive dissidence. Moreover, the work is not anti-imperialistic: it does not oppose the expansionism of the Roman Empire. Hermas's moderation is not so much a tactical move, aiming at good relations with the establishment (because of a fear of persecutions, socio-economic reasons, or missionary aspirations, for instance), as it is a matter of pragmatism. Living in or near the centre of Roman political power, the author realized that there was no point in standing up against the authorities.

Hermas does not explicitly mention the emperor cult, but his critique on idolatry, which may well include the worship of the emperor (Mand. 4.1.9; Sim. 9.21.3), his views on God's supreme power (Vis. 3.3.5; Sim. 5.7.3; 9.23.4), his orientation towards the east (where the divine traditionally manifests itself, Vis. 1.4.1, 3) instead of the west (Rome), his expectation of the replacement of the established order (Vis. 1.3.4) by God's Kingdom (Sim. 9.12.3-5, 8; 9.13.2; 9.15.2-3; 9.16.2-4; 9.20.2-3; 9.29.2; 9.31.2), and his use of apotheosis terminology for ordinary humans (Vis. 1.1.4-5, 7) all indicate that the veneration of the emperor is challenged and rejected. The way in which the author formulates these critical views indicates that he is not so much criticizing an actual practice among Christians as warning against worshipping others than God alone. Hermas attempts to affirm and strengthen the identity of the Christian community.⁶⁰

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60 I wish to thank Professor Joseph Verheyden (KU Leuven) and emeritus Professor Henk Jan de Jonge (Leiden University) for their useful comments on an earlier version of this article.

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Noble Death or Death Cult?

Pagan Criticism of Early Christian Martyrdom

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1. Introduction

Suffering and persecution forms an almost ubiquitous backdrop to most of the documents that make up the New Testament. In the first extant piece of Christian writing, the epistle to the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul suggests persecution is an ever-present danger. He claims that his converts “received the word in much affliction (ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ; 1:6)” and received at the hands of their fellow townsfolk the same kind of persecution believers in Judea suffered from the Jews (2:14). This theme continues throughout the New Testament. As Jesus had suffered, so true Christians are called to imitate his example, embracing death where necessary (cf. Mark 8:34-38). From Paul onwards, suffering was regarded not as an unfortunate necessity, but as a mark of true discipleship. Martyrdom quickly became the ultimate act of “following the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rev. 14:4). Christians reflecting on these experiences promoted themselves, as Judith Perkins has demonstrated, as a community of sufferers.¹ Their worship of an executed criminal, their novel rites, and their scorning of state, city, and familial gods made Christians so unpopular that Luke could have one of his characters write of Christianity, “We know that everywhere it is spoken against” (Acts 28:22).

While William Bramley-Moore asserted in his introduction to Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* that “the history of Christian martyrdom is, in fact, the history of Christianity itself”,² it is now generally recognized there was little in the way of official persecution of the Christians before the mid-third century. Christian populations did undoubtedly experience hostility and some violence, but prior to Decius there was no state-wide action taken against Christians. Instead, anti-Christian actions tended to be local and sporadic. Even so, themes of persecution, suffering, and martyrdom are prominent in the writings produced by early Christians.

1 Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1995).

2 John Foxe, *The Book of Martyrs* (Revised with Notes and an Appendix by the Rev. William Bramley-Moore; London: Cassell, Petter, and Glapin, no date, c. 1875).

In their martyr accounts, Christians promoted those who endured suffering and death as heroes. The martyrs were examples of piety from whose example other Christians could learn how to be true followers. As we will see, Christians promoted the martyr as an example of a noble athlete or combatant who provided an example of courage, endurance, and bravery. It seems they expected these virtues to be appreciated by Romans steeped in the tradition of the Noble Death. But to the puzzlement of the Christians, pagans³ were unable to see the nobility in Christian martyrdom. Tertullian expresses surprise that apparent early Christian enthusiasm for martyrdom had caused pagans to dismiss them as a “desperate reckless race”, while at the same time, these same people regarded those Graeco-Roman figures who embraced death, even taking their own lives, as paragons of bravery worthy of high praise.

The very desperation and recklessness you object to in us, among yourselves lift high the standard of virtue in the cause of glory and of fame. Mucius of his own will left his right hand on the altar: what sublimity of mind! Empedocles gave his whole body at Catana to the fires of Etna: what mental resolution! A certain foundress of Carthage gave herself away in second marriage to the funeral pile: what a noble witness of her chastity! Regulus, not wishing that his one life should count for the lives of many enemies, endured these crosses over all his frame: how brave a man – even in captivity a conqueror! Anaxarchus, when he was being beaten to death by a barley-pounder, cried out, “Beat on, beat on at the case of Anaxarchus; no stroke falls on Anaxarchus himself.” O magnanimity of the philosopher, who even in such an end had jokes upon his lips! I omit all reference to those who with their own sword, or with any other milder form of death, have bargained for glory.⁴

Tertullian goes on to list several other examples from the canon of the Graeco-Roman Noble Death, and wonders why the pagans should hold these deaths as exemplary while despising Christian martyrdom, which at least in Tertullian’s eyes, surpasses these pagan examples. This essay takes up Tertullian’s query.

3 I use “pagan” as a non-pejorative term for ancients who were neither Jews nor Christians.

4 Tertullian, *Apology* 50.

2. Martyrdom and Spectacle

Early Christians appeared to have pagan audiences in mind throughout the composition of *apologia*. However, at least some martyrologies may have been designed for the same purpose. Tertullian famously observed the evangelistic effect of persecution and martyrdom: "The more we are mown down by you the greater in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed."⁵ Similarly, in the *Martyrdom of Apollonius* this claim is repeated: "The more they kill those who believe in him, so much the more will their numbers grow by God's aid."⁶ Keith Hopkins, in his study of the number of Christians in the first three centuries,⁷ agrees that it was in the mid-third century onwards, when Christianity suffered from its most intense period of persecution, that "in spite of temporary losses ... Christianity grew fastest in absolute terms".⁸

Martyrdom was a public spectacle for both Romans and Christians.⁹ Romans dispensed justice in the arena on what was almost an industrial scale,¹⁰ and law-breakers were punished in public to act as a deterrent to would-be deviants.¹¹ Seneca, among other philosophers, reasoned that punishment had to be severe in order to serve its purpose as a deterrent;¹² graphic, painful, and humiliating deaths, such as exposure to the beasts, being burned alive, or crucifixion for condemned criminals, reinforced the state's power and authority. The public nature of such punishment was important for the full implications of its message to be appreciated. As one Roman noted:

5 Ibid., 50.

6 *Martyrdom of Apollonius* 24. Unless otherwise stated, translations of martyr texts are taken from Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

7 Keith Hopkins, "Christian Number and Its Implications," *J ECS* 6 (1998): 185-226.

8 Hopkins, "Christian Number," 198.

9 See Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1998); David S. Potter, "Martyrdom as Spectacle," in *Theatre and Society in the Classical World* (ed. Ruth Scodel, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 53-88.

10 For a fascinating discussion of whether Roman punishment functioned as "human sacrifice", see Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 36-43.

11 See the important article by Kathleen M. Coleman, "Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Stated as Mythological Enactments," *JRS* 80 (1990): 44-73. Coleman notes that the modern notions of "correction" are largely absent from the Roman justice system, which was instead motivated by retribution.

12 Seneca, *On Clemency* 1.22.2: "It is more difficult to control oneself when one is exacting revenge out of anger, than when one is doing it for the sake of example."

whenever we crucify criminals, the most heavily used routes are chosen where the greatest number of people can watch and be influenced by this threat, for every penalty is aimed not so much at the offence as at its exemplary value.¹³

Executions in public encouraged a corporate revulsion of the activities which made the perpetrators enemies of the state. However, in re-enactment of popular mythologies, punishment became theatrical and served as public entertainment.¹⁴ So Tertullian recalls,

we often saw Attis, that god from Pessinus, castrated, and a man who was burnt alive had taken on the role of Hercules. We laughed at the mockery of the gods in the lunch-hour spectacle.¹⁵

Seneca captures the readiness of the crowd to encourage acts of killing:

By chance I attended a midday exhibition expecting some fun, wit, and relaxation, an exhibition at which men's eyes have respite from the slaughter of their fellow-men. But it was quite the reverse. The previous combats were the essence of compassion, but now all the trifling is put aside and it is pure murder. The men have no defensive armour. They are exposed to blows at all points...In the morning they throw men to the lions and the bears; at noon they throw them to the spectator ... The outcome of every fight is death, and the means are fire and sword. And when the games stop for the intermission, they announce, "A little throat-cutting in the meantime, so that there may still be something going on!"¹⁶

The blood-thirstiness of the crowd are similarly satisfied in *The Martyrs of Lyons*, where some of the Christians endure "whips ... mauling by animals, and anything else that the mad mob ... shouted for and demanded".¹⁷

The sacralized nature of Roman execution¹⁸ places the events of the arena not simply in a judicial context but within a moral and religious framework. Through refusing to honor state and local deities, Christians threatened the social, moral, and religious fabric of the Empire and faced

¹³ Pseudo-Quintilian, *Declamations* 274.13.

¹⁴ See Coleman, "Fatal Charades".

¹⁵ Tertullian, *To the Nations* 1.10.47.

¹⁶ Seneca, *Epistles* 7.3-5.

¹⁷ *Martyrs of Lyons* 38.

¹⁸ Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 40.

execution in the arena. Importantly, for the Romans, this did not constitute *persecution* of Christians; it was *prosecution* of individuals deemed to be a threat to the state.¹⁹

Not all miscreants experienced such brutal punishment for their crimes. Rome operated with a twin-track justice system, with those of noble status (*honestiores*) enjoying punishments less harsh and degrading than the *humiliores*. The former were (in theory at least) exempt from flogging, torture, burning, crucifixion, or execution, except in cases of treason.²⁰ The low status accorded to Christians is indicated by the manner of punishments recorded in their martyrologies. Flogging,²¹ torture,²² exposure to beasts,²³ crucifixion,²⁴ and burning²⁵ are all employed against the Christians in the martyr acts. Moreover, the contempt in which the Christians were held along with what was deemed to be appropriate punishment is revealed in Tacitus's description of Nero's attempt to shift suspicion of causing the great fire from himself to the Christians.

Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome ... Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.²⁶

19 See Paul Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity* (LNTS 307; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 40-70 on the clash between Christians and Rome.

20 The classic study is Peter Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970). See also Richard A. Bauman, *Crime and Punishment in Ancient Rome* (Classical Studies. Legal Studies; London: Routledge, 1996).

21 *Martyrs of Lyons* 38.

22 For example, *Martyrdom of Carpus* 23; *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 2.2.

23 For example, *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 3.1-2; *Martyrdom of Perpetua* 19-21.

24 For example, *Martyrs of Lyons* 38.

25 *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 15.

26 Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.

Tacitus clearly does not believe the Christians were guilty of causing the fire,²⁷ yet he considers the punishments to be appropriate for “a class hated for their abominations” who display “hatred of the human race” (*odio humani generis*). As in the martyr acts, Christians are thrown to beasts, crucified, and burned.

Even if Tacitus does not accurately record the events some half a century prior to his writing, he almost certainly reflects a popular attitude to Christians in his own time. Pliny the Younger confirms this negative view in his correspondence with Trajan:

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For *I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished*.²⁸

Neither Pliny nor Tacitus appeared to know very much about Christian beliefs. Nonetheless, both had developed such a negative view of Christians to believe they deserved punishment for their attitudes rather than any specific criminal activity. Christians were *humilores* deserving of the most cruel and public punishment and correction. In the arena, these wrongdoers who slighted the Roman gods were humiliated and executed, which in turn restored the honor of the gods and reinforced the Roman view of the world.²⁹

However, Christians took these same events and transformed experiences of humiliation and death into victory and winning life. The Christians read their experiences in the arena not as criminals undergoing trial but as athletes and gladiators enduring a cosmic conflict.³⁰ Christian descriptions of trials and martyrdoms liberally employ the language of the games,³¹

27 Tacitus believes Nero started the fire, as did Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 17.1, 5), Suetonius (*Nero* 38), and Dio Cassius (76.6). Interestingly, none of these writers mention the Christians in relation to the fire.

28 Pliny, *Epistles* 10.96 (emphasis added).

29 For the mutually incompatible world views of Christians and Romans, see Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 54-70.

30 See Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 79-82, 128-34.

31 For example, Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 6; Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 17-20; *Martyrs of Lyons* 1.42; 2.6-8; *Martyrdom of Fructuosus* 6.1.

whether or not they faced death in the arena.³² Those who desire to follow the martyrs' example must undergo training and preparation for the contest.

Gathering here ... we celebrate the anniversary of his [Polycarp's] martyrdom, both as memorial for those who have already fought the contest and for the training and preparation of those who will do so one day.³³

Tertullian explicitly employs athletic or military metaphors in his writing on martyrdom. He saw the Christians as soldiers serving under God's oath not to commit idolatry.³⁴ Trials or interrogations of Christians, with the pressure placed on the believer to recant, marked the fulcrum of battle.

I am challenged by the enemy. If I surrender to them, I am as they are. In maintaining this oath, I fight furiously in battle, am wounded, hewn in pieces, slain. Who wished this fatal issue to his soldier, but he who sealed him by such an oath.³⁵

This oath (*sacramentum*) taken by Tertullian, which he also commends to other Christians, finds a parallel in the oath taken by gladiators (*sacramentum gladiatorum*): "I will endure to be burned, to be bound, to be beaten, and to be killed by the sword".³⁶ In Christian retellings of trials and executions, those condemned as criminals become gladiatorial athletes, who endure torture and hold to their confession, and win martyrdom.³⁷

We see this transformation in the *Martyrs of Lyons*, where the weak slave girl Blandina becomes a noble athlete (γενναῖος ἀθλητής) who defeats the torturers through her power (δυνάμεως).³⁸ Similarly, the catechumen Martus is said to be a noble contestant (γενναῖον ἀγωνιστήν).³⁹ The martyrs display the noble characteristic of endurance (ὑπομονή), the quality an athlete

32 For example, *Martyrdom of Carpus* 35; *Martyrs of Lyons* 1.1; 1.17; *Martyrdom of Perpetua* 10; Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 1, 17–20, 34, 42, 49; *Martyrdom of Ignatius* 5.

33 *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 18.3.

34 See, for example, Tertullian, *To the Martyrs* 3.

35 Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 4.4.

36 Petronius, *Satyricon* 117.

37 For a discussion of the language of the games in martyr texts, see the study by L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (Gender, Theory, and Religion; New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008), 33–59; Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 72–82.

38 *Martyrs of Lyons* 17–19.

39 *Martyrs of Lyons* 17.

develops in self-training for the contest.⁴⁰ In the *Martyrdom of Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonice*, athletic imagery and endurance are closely connected. During his torture, Papyrus “endured” three pairs of torturers as he is scraped, and by not uttering a sound “received the angry onslaught of the adversary like a noble athlete.”⁴¹ Papyrus’s silence under torture points to another element borrowed from the games that is crucial in the description of martyrdom: the importance of public witness.

In Christian martyrologies, the crowds become an important literary character. To be sure, there are occasions where they are hostile,⁴² such as demanding the martyrs’ arrest or appearance,⁴³ calling for certain punishments,⁴⁴ or desecrating the remains of the martyr.⁴⁵ In these depictions, what the Christians say about the crowds matches the attitudes recounted by Seneca. However, on other occasions, they express amazement at the courage of the martyrs. The soldiers and the governor are amazed at Polycarp’s piety and joyful courage, and express sorrow at the fate of such an old man.⁴⁶ As Polycarp dies, “even the crowd marvelled that there should be such a difference between the unbelievers and the elect.”⁴⁷ In other texts, the apparent happiness of the martyrs causes the crowd to be amazed.⁴⁸

The possible impact of their deaths on the pagan crowds was not lost on the Christians, and they urged one another to die well for the sake of the unbelievers.⁴⁹ The texts seek to engineer sympathy and admiration for the martyrs:

40 Ignatius, *To the Ephesians* 3.1; see also *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 2; *Martyrs of Lyons* 1. 6, 7; *Martyrdom of Potamioena* 4-5. For the training of gladiators to produce endurance, see Louis Robert, *Les Gladiateurs dans L'Orient Grec* (Bibliothèque de L'École des hautes études. Sciences historiques et philosophiques 278; Paris: E. Champion, 1940), 16-23. Endurance is identified as the key element in Ignatius’s strategy to confront suffering (Ignatius, *Magnesians* 1.1; *Trallians* 4.1). Compare *Testament of Job* 17:7 where endurance is considered better than anything.

41 *Martyrdom of Carpus* 35.

42 *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 12.2; *Martyrs of Lyons* 1.3; 1.15; 1.17; 1.30; 1.39; 1.50; 1.53; 1.57; *Martyrdom of Potamioena* 3.

43 *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 3.2; *Martyrs of Lyons* 1.43.

44 *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 12.2, 3; *Martyrdom of Perpetua* 18.9.

45 *Martyrs of Lyons* 1.57; 1.60. Polycarp’s remains are cremated at the instigation of “the Jews” (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17.1-18.1).

46 *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 7.3. 12.1.

47 *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 16. See also *Martyrdom of Carpus* 38-39.

48 *Martyrdom of Carpus* 38-39.

49 Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 2, 36. Given the importance of gladiatorial imagery, it is interesting to note that the importance of putting on a good show was also great to the gladiators. See especially Seneca, *On Tranquility of Mind* 11.4.

After being tossed a good deal by the animal, she no longer perceived what was happening because of the hope and possession of all she believed in and because of her intimacy with Christ. Thus she too was offered in sacrifice, while the pagans themselves admitted that no woman had ever suffered so much in their experience.⁵⁰

The historicity of such accounts scarcely matters. The crowd's reaction elevates the bravery and nobility of the martyrs and acts to strengthen the resolve of those who may also undergo martyrdom.⁵¹ The deaths of the Christians were a public testimony to unbelievers.⁵²

Who indeed would not admire the martyrs' nobility, their courage, their love of the Master? For even when they were torn by whips until the very structure of their bodies was laid bare down to the inner veins and arteries, they endured it, making even the bystanders weep for pity.⁵³

Kathleen Coleman notes that despite such alleged sympathy to the martyrs there are no instances where the crowd called for Christian prisoners to be released, which leads her to doubt whether Christians ever received much public sympathy.⁵⁴ This may indeed be the case. However, it is also true that a dramatic rescue would not suit the purpose of the martyrologist who wishes to demonstrate to other Christians that martyrdom should be chosen rather than cowardice. Ultimately, the crowds are at the mercy of the martyrologist rather than the other way around.

Christians not only reinterpreted the trials and martyrdom in the arena positively, they also confronted the Roman narrative that they were abominable criminals deserving of humiliating torture and death. Tertullian contrasts the behavior of Christians in the arena from other criminals.

50 *Martyrs of Lyons* 1.56. See also the examples of the martyrs who made light of their burden (*Martyrs of Lyons* 1.6); Blandina (1.19); Alexander (1.52); Papyrus (*Martyrdom of Carpus* 35); a crowd who endured the sword without a word (*Martyrdom of Perpetua* 21.8) and Polycarp, who is given strength to endure the flames without being nailed to the post (13.3–14.1). See also *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 2.2; 13.3; *Martyrdom of Carpus* 35; *Martyrs of Lyons* 19, 51, 56. See also *Martyrdom of Isaiah* 5.8–14.

51 *Martyrs of Lyons* 1.11; *Martyrdom of Apollonius* 47.

52 *Martyrdom of Carpus* 40; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.2.4–5; *Martyrdom of Marian* 6.1; *Martyrdom of Fructuosus* 6.3.

53 *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 2.2.

54 Coleman, "Fatal charades," 58.

You find that criminals are eager to conceal themselves, avoid appearing in public, are in trepidation when they are caught, deny their guilt, when they are accused; even when they are put to the rack, they do not easily or always confess; when there is no doubt about their condemnation, they grieve for what they have done ... But what is there like this in the Christian's case? The only shame or regret he feels, is at not having been a Christian earlier. If he is pointed out, he glories in it; if he is accused, he offers no defence; interrogated, he makes voluntary confession; condemned he renders thanks.⁵⁵

The attitude to suffering and torture distinguishes Christians from those who would seek to avoid pain and death. Similarly, many Christian texts show the martyr confronting the hostile crowd by staring directly at them.⁵⁶ It was expected that the condemned would fear the crowd and lower their eyes. Staring down the enemy was considered to be a sign of bravery. Pliny the Elder recounts that of Caligula's twenty thousand gladiators, only two were able to stand unflinching when threatened, and were therefore considered to be invincible.⁵⁷ In Christian texts, it is the martyrs who fulfil this role. Polycarp not only looks straight at the crowd, he denounces them as atheists, while shaking his fist.⁵⁸ Perpetua and Felicitas also win their confrontation with the crowd, as Perpetua stares defiantly as she enters the arena.⁵⁹ Moreover, later in the narrative, it is the crowd who cannot bear to look upon the naked figures of Perpetua and Felicity; it is they who lower their eyes and so play the part of the condemned in the narrative. In reality, it is far from clear whether anyone would have noticed such acts of defiance from the Christians. However, the literary presentation of these events turns common criminals into noble warriors and athletes

3. Christian Noble Death

In recasting criminals condemned to die in the arena as gladiators who exhibit qualities of nobility, bravery, and endurance, Christians evoked the ancient Noble Death tradition. The insensibility to or endurance of pain was

55 Tertullian, *Apology* 1.10-13.

56 See Carlin A. Barton, "Savage Miracles: The Redemption of Lost Honor in Roman Society and the Sacrament of the Gladiator and the Martyr," *Representations* 45 (1994): 48-49 for examples.

57 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 11.54.144

58 *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 9.2.

59 *Martyrdom of Perpetua* 18.2.

celebrated by Seneca, who regards not only athletes but also those tortured in the arena as examples of courage to be emulated.

What blows do athletes receive on their faces and all over their bodies! Nevertheless, through their desire for fame, they endure every torture, and they undergo these things not only because they are fighting but in order to be able to fight. Their very training means torture...Think of all the brave men who have conquered pain ... of him who did not cease to smile, though that very smile so enraged his torturers that they tried upon him every instrument of their cruelty. If pain can be conquered by a smile, will it not be conquered by reason? You may tell me now of whatever you like – of colds, hard coughing-spells ... yet worse than these are the stake, the rack, the red-hot plates, the instrument that reopens wounds while the wounds themselves are still swollen and that drives their imprint still deeper. Nevertheless, there have been men who have not uttered a moan amid these tortures. “More yet!” says the torturer; but the victim has not begged for release. “More yet!” he says again; but no answer has come. “More yet!” the victim has smiled, and heartily, too. Can you not bring yourself, after an example like this, to make a mock at pain?⁶⁰

Christian martyrology could almost have been written in answer to Seneca's rhetorical challenge.

Christians employed the noble qualities of courage, athleticism, and endurance as they depicted their heroes not as common criminals but as conquering and victorious warriors successfully resisting all attempts to make them recant their beliefs. The moment of victory was, of course, a successful death. As we have noted, Tertullian attempts to persuade his hostile audience that Christian martyrdom is comparable, if not superior to, the Noble Death. Why was this rhetorical strategy unsuccessful?

Tertullian mentions among the categories of the Noble Death those who had bargained for glory with their own sword, and suicide could indeed be counted as such. There was no word in either Latin or Greek corresponding to our word “suicide” with its negative connotations.⁶¹ Indeed, in the ancient mind, self-killing in the correct circumstances was considered to be an

60 Seneca, *Epistles* 78.15-19.

61 See the studies of ancient suicide by Anton J. L. van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide: Self Killing in Classical Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1992) and Yolande Gris , *Le Suicide dans la Rome antique* (Montreal/Laval: Bellamin, 1982).

honorable practice.⁶² In general terms, the circumstances of one's suicide, rather than the act itself, determined whether or not it counted as a "Noble Death".

4. Socrates and the Philosophers

Perhaps the most famous example of a Noble Death is that of Socrates (469-399 BCE), who was convicted of impiety (ἀσεβεία) and corrupting the young, and was sentenced to death by an Athenian court. Rather than going into voluntary exile, he chose death by hemlock. Epictetus enthusiastically approves of Socrates' refusal to avoid death by exile: "He saves himself by dying, not by flight" (4.1.165). Similarly, Plato has Socrates say that the philosopher should welcome death, since through it one attains the greatest blessings (*Phaedrus* 64A). Plato portrays the death of Socrates as a voluntary act, and commends the practice; others are urged to come after him as quickly as they could (*Phaedrus* 61BC). However, the Platonic Socrates does not approve of self-killing in all circumstances. Individuals belong to the gods; one should not destroy what is not one's own to destroy. However, he reasons, when the gods place a necessity (ἀνάγκη) upon an individual, then self-killing is permitted.⁶³ For Socrates, death is no tragedy: "So long as we have the body, and the soul is contaminated by such an evil, we shall never attain completely what we desire, that is, the truth."⁶⁴

Other philosophical schools echoed Socrates' ambivalence towards death. For Epicurus, neither life nor death contributes to the good life; they are adiaphorous. The dead are simply as they were before they were born.⁶⁵ The Stoics displayed a similar ambivalence towards death.⁶⁶ Death is inevitable, and for Seneca, to be alive is to be in the process of dying.⁶⁷ For the Stoics, the decision to take one's own life should be rational: "the

62 Important is Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992) and Jan Willem van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian Antiquity* (Context of early Christianity; London: Routledge, 2002).

63 Arthur J. Droge, "Mori Lucrum: Paul and Ancient Theories of Suicide," *Novum Testamentum* 30 (1988): 263-86.

64 Plato, *Phaedrus* 66B.

65 Cicero, *De finibus* 1.49.

66 Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.19.13.

67 Seneca, *Epistles* 1.2. See John M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

wise man will for reasonable cause make his own exit from life, on his country's behalf or for the sake of friends, or if he suffer intolerable pain, mutilation, or incurable disease."⁶⁸ Plato added three further instances to the philosophers' judgements of when a person should take his or her own life: when ordered to do so by the state; when experiencing devastating misfortune; or in the face of intolerable shame.⁶⁹ Shame was one of the more common reasons for a Noble Death in the ancient world. In Anton van Hooff's major study on self-killing in the ancient world, more than one-third of the total of suicides catalogued is motivated by shame.⁷⁰ If the Stoics were positive or at least indifferent towards death, the Cynics were in some cases very enthusiastic, and many killed themselves for what appear to be rather trivial reasons.⁷¹ In the main, most philosophical schools accepted that there were circumstances in which self-killing was justified or could be considered noble.

The most glorious form of Noble Death was that achieved heroically in battle for the homeland. Euripides writes of the Trojans, "in the first place [they] died for their fatherland – the noblest glory of all."⁷² The most famous expression of this phenomenon is Horace's dictum, *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*.⁷³ A similar form of Noble Death is *devotio*, a voluntary death where life was deliberately surrendered to ensure victory, usually through a form of contract with the gods. So, in the Samnite Wars (340 B.C.E.), the Roman general Publius Decius Mus devoted himself to the gods of the underworld, then rushed headlong towards a violent death against the opposing army to secure victory for his depleted army.⁷⁴ Similarly, Menoeceus and Polyvena also volunteered for death in order to save their respective cities.⁷⁵

These factors combine with the motivation of shame when generals faced certain defeat on the battlefield. After his defeat by Caesar, Cato the Younger stabbed himself rather than being forced to ask his enemy to spare his life. In doing so, he remained his own master.⁷⁶ Similarly, having been

68 Diogenes Laertius 7.130; see also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1169a. However, Aristotle also regarded suicide to escape poverty as cowardly (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1116a12-14).

69 Droge, "Mori Lucrum," 266.

70 Van Hooff, *Autothanasia*.

71 Droge ("Mori Lucrum," 267) concludes there is "little evidence the Cynics possessed a fully worked out theory of suicide".

72 Euripides, *Trojan Women* 386-87.

73 Horace, *Carmen saeculare* 3.2.13.

74 Livy 8.9.6-10.

75 Euripides, *Phoenician Women* 930-59; *Hecuba* 38-41.

76 Plutarch, *Cato the Younger* 69-71.

defeated by the Parthians in 53 B.C.E., Roman soldiers killed themselves to avoid falling into enemy hands, but Publius, unable to despatch himself, ordered his shield bearer to finish him off.⁷⁷ Death in the face of defeat is usually portrayed by the narrators as a positive and appropriate noble option.⁷⁸ Noble death was essentially a means of restoring honor or asserting control over one's life where that was threatened.

5. Judaism and Noble Death

If the Christians were not so good at conveying the “nobleness” of their martyrs, Jews had less trouble. The Maccabean martyrs' deaths “for others”, for the law, and for the fatherland can plausibly be cast as Noble Deaths. Josephus, who of course was writing for a Roman audience, certainly employs Noble Death tropes in his recounting of Jewish history, as van Henten, Feldman, and Williams have all noted.⁷⁹ Josephus's extended discussions on suicide – in favor of the practice in the case of Masada (*Jewish War* 7.320–388), and against it in the case of Jotapata, when his own life was at risk (*Jewish War* 3.362–382) – draws heavily on the Graeco-Roman philosophers, especially the *Phaedo*, from which he quotes near verbatim.⁸⁰ Again, themes of honor, especially favoring death over slavery or humiliation are central.

77 Plutarch, *Crassus* 25.11. There is a striking similarity here with Saul's death (1 Sam. 31:1–5), with both texts probably picking up a common fear among those engaging in battle of falling into enemy hands. See Paul Middleton, *Martyrdom: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 10–11.

78 Lucan, *Civil War* (4.447–581) recounts the story of the general Vulteius and his men who find themselves surrounded by Pompeians crossing the Adriatic. Holding off until nightfall, and with no possibility of victory, they engage in mutual suicide, with the general arguing, “No one can be forced to die who wishes to die.”

79 Jan Willem van Henten, “Martyrion and Martyrdom: Some Remarks about Noble Death in Josephus” in *Internationales Josephus-Kolloquium Brüssel 1998* (eds. Jürgen U. Kalms and Folker Siegert; Münster: LIT, 1999), 136. For further discussion, see especially Jan Willem van Henten *The Maccabean Martyrs as the Saviours of the Jewish People: A Study in 2 & 4 Maccabees* (JSJSup 57; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 210–22; Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Sam K. Williams, *Jesus' Death as Saving Event: The Background and Origin of a Concept* (HDR 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1975).

80 For a discussion, see David J. Ladouceur, “Josephus and Masada” in *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity* (eds. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata; Brill: Leiden, 1987), 97–101. This includes a near verbatim quotation in *Jewish War* 3.372. For a discussion of the presentation of Jewish martyrdom and suicide in this period, see David Goodblatt, “Suicide in the Sanctuary: Traditions on Priestly Martyrdom,” *JJS* 46 (1995): 10–29.

So for example, Herod's brother, Phaseal, captured by the Parthians, killed himself despite his hands being tied by hitting his head on a rock. Josephus invites his readers to

admire his courage, for though he knew that he was marked for slaughter, he did not look upon the death as terrible in itself but believed that it was a most bitter and shameful thing to suffer at the hands of a foe ... thus he deprived the enemy of the power of killing him as they pleased (Jewish Antiquities 14.368).

Phaseal's actions clearly fall within the scope of the Noble Death in avoiding capture on the battlefield.

Similarly, in the books of the Maccabees, Razi goes to extraordinary lengths to kill himself in order to avoid capture by the Seleucid soldiers (2 Macc. 14:37-46). After several unsuccessful suicide attempts by sword and throwing himself off a wall, he disembowelled himself and threw his innards over the mob. The author of 2 *Maccabees* clearly regarded Razi as a hero and a defender of the Law; indeed, he is dubbed "Father of the Jews" (2 Macc. 14:37).⁸¹ Earlier in the narrative, the elderly scribe Eleazar takes on a similar "fatherly" role. He is tortured in order to force him to abandon his ancestral laws by eating pork. On account of his age, the courtiers offer him an opportunity simply to pretend to eat pork. However, Eleazar refuses the offer on account that many of the young would be led astray (2 Macc. 6:24). Eleazar instead offers himself as a model of how Jews should die

by manfully (ἀνδρείως) giving up my life now, I will show myself worthy of my old age and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws. (2 Macc. 6:27-28)

The author employs the language of the Noble Death in his presentation of Eleazar's resistance to torture and eventual execution. Eleazar's death in 4 *Maccabees* also explicitly links his Noble Death with that of those who would follow his example.

May we, the children of Abraham, never think so basely that out of cowardice we ... become a pattern of impiety to the young, in becoming an example of the eating of defiling food ... and if we should be despised by the tyrant as unmanly, and not protect our divine law even to death.

81 For an extensive discussion, see van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 85-124.

Therefore, O children of Abraham, die nobly for your religion! (4 Macc. 6:17-22)

In both 2 and 4 *Maccabees*, Eleazar's model of noble death for the ancestral laws is followed by seven brothers, tortured and eventually executed by the king. Each brother refuses to recant, preferring instead death over turning away from the laws of their fathers.⁸² Through their endurance, the brothers win their struggle against the king.⁸³ Familiar Noble Death language was consciously and explicitly employed by Jewish authors from the author of 2 *Maccabees* to Josephus in recounting the stories of their heroes who had died for the fatherland and ancestral laws.

Christians also invoked the Noble Death tradition. However, unlike the Jews, they had no "fatherland" or homeland for which to fight. Much of the Noble Death tradition was set against the backdrop of warfare, and although Christians certainly employed the language of warfare, with no possibility of engaging in battle, this language was, at least initially, entirely spiritualized, making it inaccessible to pagan observers.⁸⁴ Ironically, Jewish revolts against Rome may have enhanced Roman appreciation of the Jewish Noble Death tradition.

Christians did attempt to claim the tradition using the language of the games, or to invoke the Noble Death legacy. We have already seen Tertullian's attempts to persuade his readers that martyrdom compares well with the tradition. Elsewhere he goes further in suggesting that Socrates anticipates Christian suffering for the truth.⁸⁵ Furthermore, Christians also appropriated the example of Socrates, arguing their martyrs equalled or surpassed the Greek hero. Justin claims the philosopher's mantle by arguing that the charges made against Christians were the same as those made against Socrates, that of introducing new gods.⁸⁶ Other martyr acts

82 2 Macc. 7:2, 5, 24, 30.

83 Van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, 257-65; David deSilva, 4 *Maccabees* (Septuagint Commentary Series 4; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 244-56. Νίκη is specifically employed for the martyrs' victory in 4 Macc. 1:31; 6:30; 7:4; 8:2; 9:6, 30; 16:14; 17:25.

84 "[Christians] never had an army or a homeland, and so no possibility for revolt ever existed. It was the same apocalyptic war tradition of the Jews, but for the Christian it was immediately spiritualized, universalized and transferred to the cosmic realm." Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 133.

85 Tertullian, *To the Nations* 1.4. He is, however, less enthusiastic about Socrates in *On the Soul* 1. Celsus, of course, criticizes the comparison between Jesus and Socrates on account of Jesus's prevarication in Gethsemane. Origen, *Against Celsus* 2.38-42.

86 Justin, *Second Apology* 10; see also *First Apology* 5. For a discussion on the role of Socrates in Christian texts, see L. Arik Greenberg, "My Share of God's Reward": *Exploring the Roles and*

invoke the example of Socrates for apologetic purposes. In the *Martyrdom of Pionius*, the eponymous hero defends himself by invoking the memory of Socrates and other ancient heroes.

A bystander ... who had a reputation for superiority in rhetoric, said to him: "Cease, Pionius; do not be a fool!"

And Pionius answered him: "Is this your rhetoric? Is this your literature? Even Socrates did not suffer thus from the Athenians. But now everyone is an Anytus and a Meletus. Were Socrates and Aristides and Anaxarchus and all the rest fools in your view because they practised philosophy and justice and courage?"⁸⁷

Pionius's rhetoric confounds his critics as he invokes the legacy of the ancient philosopher heroes. In the *Martyrdom of Apollonius*, the author compares the unjust treatment of Socrates with not only that suffered by Christians, but also Jesus:

[Jesus] attained a great reputation for virtue. Still he was despised by the ignorant, like the philosophers and just men who lived before him. For the wicked have no use for the righteous ... The Athenian informers convinced the people and then unjustly condemned Socrates; so too our Saviour and teacher was condemned by a few malefactors after they had him bound.⁸⁸

The prominence of Socrates in this text has led Dennis MacDonald to the conclusion that here, the death of the martyr is presented as "an *imitation Socratis* as well as an *imitatio Christi*."⁸⁹ Some Christians, such as John Chrysostom, went further, arguing that the deaths of Christian martyrs were not only *like* Socrates but surpassed that of the philosopher's.

Formulation of the Afterlife in Early Christian Martyrdom (Studies in Biblical Literature 121; New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009), 43-70.

87 *Martyrdom of Pionius* 17. Anytus and Meletus were prosecutors of Socrates.

88 *Martyrdom of Apollonius* 38-39, 41.

89 Dennis R. MacDonald, *Christianizing Homer: The Odyssey, Plato, and the Acts of Andrew* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 252. The death of Socrates is explicitly referenced in many non-Christian texts, especially where there is some controversy over the cause. This is particularly true in deaths resulting in opposition to the Emperors, for example, Cato Uticensis in his opposition to Julius Caesar (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.71-74). See especially, Klaus Döring, *Exemplum Socratis: Studien zur Sokratensnachwirkung in der kynisch-stoischen Popularphilosophie der frühen Kaiserzeit und im frühen Christentum* (Hermes 42; Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1979), 16-20.

But among them [the philosophers] also, it will be said, many have been found contemnors of death. Tell me who? was it he who drank the hemlock? But if you wish, I can bring forward ten thousand such from within the Church ... And besides, he drank when he was not at liberty to drink or not to drink ... But with us it is all quite the contrary. For not against their will did the martyrs endure, but of their will, and being at liberty not to suffer ... This then you see is no great wonder, that he whom I was mentioning drank hemlock; it being no longer in his power not to drink, and also when he had arrived at a very great age. For when he despised life he stated himself to be seventy years old; if this can be called despising. For I for my part could not affirm it: nor, what is more, can anyone else. But show me some one enduring firm in torments for godliness' sake, as I show you ten thousand everywhere in the world. Who, while his nails were tearing out, nobly endured? Who, while his body joints were wrenching asunder? Who, while his body was cut in pieces, member by member? or his head? Who, while his bones were forced out by levers? Who, while placed without intermission upon frying-pans? Who, when thrown into a caldron? Show me these instances. For to die by hemlock is all as one with a man's continuing in a state of sleep. Nay even sweeter than sleep is this sort of death.⁹⁰

In the first instance, Chrysostom points out that Socrates had no choice but to drink the hemlock, whereas the Christians go to their deaths of their own free will.⁹¹ Second, the violent manner of the deaths of the Christians requires more bravery, since drinking hemlock is like falling asleep. Third, Chrysostom claimed to be able to name ten thousand Christian martyrs for every Socrates. And fourth, Socrates despised his life at a great age whereas, by contrast, many Christians were being executed in the prime of their lives. It was, Chrysostom argued, a much greater thing for Christians to despise their lives. For Chrysostom, the paradigm of pagan death compares rather unfavorably with its Christian counterpart.

90 John Chrysostom, *Homily IV on I Corinthians 1.18-20*.

91 Droge and Tabor (*Noble Death*, 162 n.50) note that this is the first time Socrates' drinking of the hemlock is portrayed as being forced, rather than a voluntary act.

6. Pagan Criticism of Noble Death

Christians, therefore, interpreted the deaths of their number in the tradition of the Noble Death. Criminals were transformed into athletes, the executed became cosmic victors, and those who were thought to provoke their own deaths were interpreted within the tradition of Socrates. Contemporary scholars have also identified connections between martyrdom and the Noble Death.⁹² In a recent essay, van Henten identified five similarities between the two phenomena: identity construction; patriotic death; defeating opponents; faithfulness to one's convictions; and beneficial death.⁹³ He draws connections especially with the Athenian tradition of funeral orations, where the dead are praised for faithfulness to ancestral laws and customs.⁹⁴ Yet, while Jewish death was at least in part accepted into the Graeco-Roman Noble Death tradition, pagans were simply unable to process Christian martyrdom. Despite the Christians' best efforts to portray their deaths as noble, the Romans simply could not recognize it. Lucian, writing in the second century, says about the Christians:

The poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live forever, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves over to arrest.⁹⁵

Lucian notes that Christian belief about their post-mortem fate results in actions he finds somewhat bemusing. So confident are the Christians about their immortality that they are prepared to hand themselves over to arrest and execution.⁹⁶ Marcus Cornelius Fronto (c. 100-166) also notes

92 Droge and Tabor, *Noble Death*. Williams, *Jesus' Death*.

93 Jan Willem van Henten, "Noble Death and Martyrdom in Antiquity" in *Martyriumsvorstellungen in Antike und Mittelalter: Leben oder Sterben für Gott?* (eds. Sebastian Fuhrmann and Regina Grundmann; Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 80; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 85-110.

94 For example, Thucydides 2.36, 41; Plato, *Menexenus* 237ab; Lysias, *Orations* 2.17; 23.24. Van Henten ("Noble Death," 87) also draws some important distinctions between the martyrdom of Jews and Christians and the Noble Death tradition: Religion as motivation; posthumous reward; testimony during trial, *imitatio Christi*; and defeating the devil.

95 Lucian, *Passing of Peregrinus* 13.

96 On the phenomenon of voluntary martyrdom, see the classic study by G. E. M. de Sainte Croix, "Why were the Early Christians Persecuted?" *Past and Present* 26 (1963): 6-38; also Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*; Christel Butterweck, "*Martyriumssucht*" in *der alten Kirche?: Studien zur Darstellung und Deutung frühchristlicher Martyrien* (BHT 87; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995); Paul Middleton, "Early Christian Voluntary Martyrdom: A Statement for the Defence," *JTS* 64 (2013): 556-573.

the contrast between Christian belief about the present and future: "They despise torments...while they fear to die after death, they do not fear to die for the present: so does their deceitful hope soothe their fear with the solace of a revival."⁹⁷ Interestingly, Marcus does not marvel at the ability of the Christians to withstand torture. The fact that they are sustained by an unreasonable belief renders their endurance of little value. For these two writers, Christian beliefs about the afterlife resulted in a bizarre death wish. Therefore, whereas Seneca admired those who withstood torture, it seems that the cause of the torture was also a relevant factor in determining whether or not a death was noble. Epictetus found Christian desire for death to be madness.⁹⁸ According to the Noble Death tradition, one had to establish that death was voluntary and not forced:

While it is praiseworthy to shorten your life when you still have years to look forward to, it is equally praiseworthy to shorten your life even by a moment – provided you summon death by your own hand.⁹⁹

However, it seems that the Christians did this too well and seemed to be *too* eager for death, so that it was regarded as habitual behavior.¹⁰⁰ In the minds of these pagan authors, Christians were so associated with a contempt for death that their martyrdom was dismissed as being unreflective and therefore ignoble.¹⁰¹

I have previously argued that these pagan criticisms of Christian enthusiasm for death corroborates the evidence in Christian texts which suggest provoked or "radical" martyrdom was an early mainstream phenomenon in the early Church.¹⁰² Whether or not one accepts this conclusion, the evidence suggests pagans did associate the Christians with a lust for death which went beyond the reflective nature of noble death. They also seem to be aware of the attempt to link martyrdom with the Noble Death tradition. Marcus Aurelius rejects the comparison: "[the willingness to die] should be

97 Municius Felix, *Octavius* 8-9. *Octavius* is a Christian apologetic work, set out as a dialogue between the Christian, Octavius, and the pagan Caecilius, on a journey from Roman to Ostia. Municius acts as both narrator and arbitrator.

98 Epictetus, *Discourses* 4.7.1-6.

99 Lucan, *Civil War* 4.447-581. See Barton, "Savage Miracles," 55-56 for a discussion on the importance of establishing the voluntary nature of death.

100 Epictetus, *Discourses* 4.7.6.

101 Perkins, *Suffering Self*, 20.

102 Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 16-39; see also "Early Christian Voluntary Martyrdom".

deliberate, reasoned, and dignified, and if it is to convince anyone, should be free from theatre."¹⁰³

Second, if there is any underlying unifying theme that characterizes the Graeco-Roman understanding of what constitutes a Noble Death, it is honor – either to gain or restore it. In stark contrast, the Christian mode of dying, spectacularly and in public, was anathema to the concept of the Noble Death. Paul's boast that "God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and men" (1 Cor. 4:9) would have horrified Marcus Aurelius. There could be no honor in following and dying for a man executed by the state. The word of the cross was folly rather than noble in the eyes of the Romans. So for Justin, the critics of the Christians "say that our madness consists in the fact that we put a crucified man in second place after the unchangeable and eternal God, the Creator of the world".¹⁰⁴ As Hengel has shown, crucifixion was a death with no possible honorable spin in the Roman or Greek world.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, this is one of the arguments employed by Celsus against Christianity.¹⁰⁶ Dying for a crucified man, therefore, could bring no honor. Christians were already viewed with suspicion; on the surface, Christianity looked like a novel *collegium* or *hetaeria* of the sort forbidden by Trajan. Their secret rites provoked a suspicion they were guilty of superstition, which Romans thought could lead to atheism, magic rites, barbarism, and depravity.¹⁰⁷ We have already seen general prejudice against the Christians reflected in both Pliny and Tacitus.¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, the form of Christian martyrdom helped exclude it from the pattern of the Noble Death. Generally, any means of death that violated the integrity of the body was considered base.¹⁰⁹ Burning, the mode of death for several Christian martyrs, was considered especially exotic and looked upon with horror, for anything that mutilated the body caused revulsion. So death by hanging and jumping were considered to be lower forms of suicide

¹⁰³ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 11.3.

¹⁰⁴ Justin, *First Apology* 13.

¹⁰⁵ Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (London: SCM Press, 1977).

¹⁰⁶ Origen, *Against Celsus* 6.10.

¹⁰⁷ See for example Plutarch, *On Superstition* 12.

¹⁰⁸ For a discussion, see Stephen Benko, "Pagan Criticism of Christianity during the first Two Centuries," *ANRW* 23.2:1055-1118; Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician: Charlatan or Son of God?* (Berkeley, CA: Seastone, 1998), 66-70.

¹⁰⁹ Van Hooff, *Autothanasia*, 51.

for the same reason.¹¹⁰ So, whereas Seneca kills himself with a single cut,¹¹¹ Ignatius desired to be “ground by the teeth of wild beasts, [and] ... fire, and the cross ... cutting and tearing apart, racking of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing of my whole body.”¹¹²

The attempt to categorize Christian martyrdom as a subset of the Noble Death was essentially an external concern. In order to persuade each other of the efficacy of martyrdom, the model laid down by Jesus was paradigmatic. Through suffering and martyrdom, Christians were perfected and gained life. This helps explain the relative enthusiastic embrace of death even if the pagans thought it madness. However, there was some concern in the presentation of martyrdom to emphasize the role of onlookers, either as characters in a narrative, or as those who had to be impressed by the manner of their deaths, possibly with conversion in mind. Martyrologies and apologies consciously drew on positive Graeco-Roman ideals, especially endurance, and also on the Noble Death tradition. Despite there being a more or less fully functioning philosophy of death, even incorporating suicide, this Christian attempt to define martyrdom as a subset of Noble Death was rather unsuccessful. Pagan writers simply did not register martyrdom as constituting Noble Death. Rather unfairly, for the pagans, Christian martyrdom was not noble but the actions of those who belonged to a death cult. Christians were dismissed as being overly enthusiastic for death such that their martyrdom was considered to be too unreflective, too spectacular, and too messy. Moreover, whereas in the Noble Death tradition, death was the solution to shame, Christian martyrdom, so far as the pagans were concerned, as the cause of shame.

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110 Barton, “Savage Miracles,” 48. On the horror of breaching the integrity of the body, see Christopher P. Jones, “Stigma: Tattooing and Branding in Graeco-Roman Antiquity,” *JRS* 77 (1987): 139-55.

111 Tacitus, *Annals* 15.60-63.

112 Ignatius, *Romans* 4.1-5.3.

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Nero Redivivus as a Subject of Early Christian Arcane Teaching

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1. Introduction

Perhaps the most fascinating emperor figure in early Christian sources is the emperor Nero. Even though his reputation in general was ambivalent, he became a central actor, often associated with the Antichrist figure in Christian eschatological teaching. This teaching, however, was not open knowledge but often restricted to an inner circle. This article will discuss some aspects of such arcane teaching relating to Antichrist figures and the *Nero redux* and *Nero redivivus* legend. No full documentation can be given here; this can be found in my overview on the figure of the emperor Nero in early Christianity and the ancient church published in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, which should be consulted for all details.¹

¹ Marco Frenschkowski, "Nero," *RAC* 25:839-878, cf. also my earlier articles "Nero," *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* 6: 611-616 and "Nero redivivus," *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* 6: 617-619. Other useful literature includes the important text collection Gian Luca Potestà and Marco Rizzi, *L'Anticristo vol. I: Il nemico dei tempi finali. Testi dal II al IV secolo* (Milano: Mondadori, 2005) and Christian Badilă, *Métamorphoses de l'Antichrist chez les pères de l'Église* (Paris: Beauchesne, 2005). More generally on Nero, see Edward Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003); Manfred Clauss, *Kaiser und Gott: Herrscherkult im römischen Reich* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1999); Massimo Fini, *Nero Zweitausend Jahre Verleumdung* (München: Herbig, 1994); Paul Gallivan, "The False Neros: A Reexamination," *Historia* 22 (1973): 364-65; Miriam T. Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984); Stefan Heid, *Chiliasmus und Antichrist-Mythos: Eine frühchristliche Kontroverse um das Heilige Land* (Bonn: Borengässer, 1993); Waltraud Jacob-Sonnabend, *Untersuchungen zum Nerobild der Spätantike* (Altertumswissenschaftliche Texte und Studien 18; Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 1990); Hans-Josef Klauck, "Do They Never Come Back? Nero redivivus and the Apocalypse of John," Hans-Josef Klauck, *Religion und Gesellschaft im frühen Christentum* (WUNT 152; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 268-289; John M. Lawrence, "Nero Redivivus," *Fides et Historia* 11 (1978): 54-66; Carlo Pascal, *Nerone nella storia aneddotica e nella legenda* (Milano: Treves, 1923; still an important book); Christoph Schubert, *Studien zum Nerobild in der lateinischen Dichtung der Antike* (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 116; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1998); Gerhard Schumann, *Hellenistische und griechische Elemente in der Regierung Neros* (Leipzig: Schwarzenberg & Schumann, 1930); Christopher Tuplin, "The False Neros of the First Century," *Studies in Latin Literature and History* 5 (1989): 364-404; Gerhard H. Waldherr, *Nero* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2005).

From its beginnings, Christianity had an element of secrecy, of arcane teaching (and we are not now speaking of emerging Gnosticism).² For example, in the gospel of Mark, Jesus is imagined as giving his last sermon to only an inner circle of four disciples (Mark 13:3), though with the gospel book itself such teaching becomes common knowledge for all disciples. The secrecy of the teaching now is an “open mystery”, a category that has some similarity to classic mystery cults like the Eleusinia. Large parts of the Athenian population had been initiated, but any public allusion to the central mysteries was strictly taboo, even in court.³ This is what we might call an “open mystery”. In apocalyptic literature, the dynamic of concealment and revelation is often a matter of time: what has previously been hidden shall “now” become revealed (Dan. 12:4; *Assumption of Moses* 1:16-18; 10:11-13; 4 *Ezra* 14:44-46; continued in the New Testament revelation schema, e.g., Col. 1:26-28; Eph. 3:4-7, 8-12; Rom. 16, 25-26 and in a wider sense 1 Cor. 2:6-10; 2 Tim. 1:9-10; Titus 1:2-3; 1 Pet. 1:20). On a more general level, the concept of secret teaching is not unusual in Hellenistic and Roman Judaism, either. For example, Josephus speaks about the never divulged secret oaths and other secrets of the Essenes (*Jewish War* 2.142).⁴ The dichotomy of mystery and revelation is part of the basic concepts of both Judaism and Christianity. There is a basic distinction, however, between rituals, cult, and oath formulas and teachings not divulged to pagans (though this may never have been strictly observed), and arcane doctrine only confided to

2 This was already clearly seen by Joachim Jeremias, *Die Abendmahlsworte Jesu* (4th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 118-130. Cf. also Fritz Graf and Wolfgang Wischmeyer, “Arkandisziplin,” *RGK* 1:743-746; Otto Perler, “Arkandisziplin,” *RAC* 1:667-676. Perler’s scepticism about the first two centuries of the Christian era is, in my judgment, unfounded; he concentrates on the secrecy of liturgical formulas and baptismal details. The phenomenon is also somewhat downplayed by Douglas Powell, “Arkandisziplin,” *TRE* 4:1-8. Increasing awareness about esotericism in ancient Judaism has much changed such an outlook (see note 4).

3 An overview of the mysteries for the general reader is given by Marco Frenschkowski, *Die Geheimbünde: Eine kulturgeschichtliche Analyse* (5th ed.; Wiesbaden: Marix, 2012), 42-77.

4 From the rich research literature, see, e.g., Gerd A. Wewers, *Geheimnis und Geheimhaltung im rabbinischen Judentum* (RGVV 35; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975); Samuel I. Thomas, *The “Mysteries” of Qumran: Mystery, Secrecy, and Esotericism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Early Judaism and Its Literature 25; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2009); Markus Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (WUNT 2.36; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990); Kees Bolle, ed., *Secrecy in Religions* (SHR 49; Leiden: Brill, 1987); Elliot Wolfson, ed., *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions* (New York, NY: Seven Bridges, 1999); Hans A. Kippenberg & Guy Stroumsa, eds., *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions* (SHR 65; Leiden: Brill, 1995); Guy Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (SHR 70; Leiden: Brill, 1996); Ann Williams Duncan, “Religion and Secrecy: A Bibliographic Essay,” *JAAR* 74 (2006): 469-482.

an inner core group of disciples. For Clement of Alexandria (*Stromateis* 6.7.61; 8.68) and Origen (*Against Celsus* 1.7), it is almost self-evident that Christianity has “secret teachings”. But these general remarks define only the reference frame of our present inquiry.

In early Christian literature, there are many allusions to aspects of eschatological events that we do not clearly understand, as they obviously are not fully expressed in our written sources. The *Revelation of John* hints without further elaboration at the participation of Christians in the future divine world rule (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; significantly changing the pretexts Ex. 19:6; 23:22 [LXX]; Isa. 61:6 etc.), and the Sayings source has similar, rather enigmatic allusions (Q 22:28, 30). And what are the twelve legions of angels that Jesus could have commanded easily (Matt. 26:53)? Paul speaks about judging the angels (1 Cor. 6:3) – with the strange epistemological ambivalence “don’t you know?” The exact eschatological destiny of Israel is a “mystery” (Rom. 11:25–26) even though now, with his very letter, it becomes accessible to Roman Christians. Both the authentic 1 *Thessalonians* and the probably pseudepigraphic 2 *Thessalonians* give sequences of eschatological events that leave much unexplained, allusions probably only explained in oral teaching. For example, the enigmatic choice of words of τὸ κατέχον / ὁ κατέχων (what / who is restraining; 2 Thess. 2:6–7) is probably deliberate;⁵ the same goes with the βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως (the abomination of desolation; Mark 13:14) which probably alludes to the Antichrist as imagined in 2 *Thessalonians*. Understanding such mysteries makes the Christian reader a kind of accomplice in secret revelatory knowledge, a conspiratorial knowledge contributing to a sense of belonging to a chosen community. We can almost speak of a flirtation with secrecy and the concept of an “open secret” – though open only to Christians (cf. 1 Thess. 5:4–5) – which does not diminish the sense of mystery. Eschatological events, however, are always revealed only in part: they stay enigmatic and mysterious, even as an “open secret”. Some parts of such teaching seem indeed not to have been expressed in public, though being accessible to an inner core group. We will see that particularly Antichrist lore has been part of such esoteric teaching, and more specifically the “Neronian connection” of such lore. There are different degrees of secrecy in Mark’s revelatory discourse: and the Antichrist seems to be quite in the centre of what even to the inner group of disciples cannot be spoken about without reservations.

5 Cf. Paul Metzger, *Katechon: II Thess 2,1–12 im Horizont apokalyptischen Denkens* (BZNW 135; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005).

2. Nero's Ambivalent Legacy

It is not the ancient historians' image of Nero that prevailed in Christian sources. The major church writers never quote Tacitus, who provides the source for many aspects of our modern view on the emperor, and even among the fourth- and fifth-century historical breviaries only Sulpicius Severus makes some use of Tacitus in his *Chronicon*. The one ancient source from which most Christians of the Latin West derived their knowledge on Nero was Suetonius, in addition to, of course, the Christian and Jewish tradition itself, as in the writings of Josephus. Things are quite different among (mainly pagan) authors writing in Greek. One of the many surprises we encounter is how many authors see a deep ambivalence in Nero instead of just condemning him; examples will be given later. On the other side, Christian tradition, as is well known, speaks about Nero in the context of Antichrist figures. These are mythological and legendary eschatological antagonists of God and Christ symbolizing rebellion, hubris, and blasphemous self-aggrandisement ("Gottesfeind," enemy of God, is a German *terminus technicus* for such figures⁶). In what follows, I will make some remarks on how Nero has been viewed in such a frame of reference.

We will begin with some widely known facts. Nero was far from unpopular in the Greek and Oriental East, and his alleged freeing of Greece on November 28th, 67 C.E. was accepted with seriousness. An inscription from Akraiphia in Boiotia declaring the autonomy of Greece (*Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* 3rd ed. no. 814) calls Nero ὁ τοῦ παντὸς κόσμου κύριος Νέρων αὐτοκράτωρ μέγιστος, "Nero the greatest emperor, the lord of the whole world" and also νέος Ἥλιος ἐπιλάμψας τοῖς Ἑλλήσιν "the new Sun enlightening the Greeks". Neos Helios had already been an epithet of Gaius Caligula, but in Neronian imperial ideology it gained a more central place. Priests were installed in the new imperial cult, and Plutarch rightly parallels it to a similar declaration by Titus Flaminus in 197 B.C.E. (*Flaminus* 12.8). The address κύριε "Lord" for the emperor even in private letters became popular only under Nero, though there are some very few instances that

6 Wolfgang Speyer, "Gottesfeind," *RAC* 11: 996-1043. From the wide range of literature, see Lambertus J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *The Antecedents of Antichrist: A Traditio-historical Study of the Earliest Christian Views on Eschatological Opponents* (JSJSup 49; Leiden: Brill, 1996) and the classic study by Wilhelm Bousset, *Der Antichrist in der Überlieferung des Judentums, des Neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche: Ein Beitrag zur Auslegung der Apokalypse* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895; reprinted Hildesheim: Olms, 1983). For a more general survey, see Mariano Delgado and Volker Leppin, eds., *Der Antichrist: Historische und systematische Zugänge* (Fribourg: Academic Press & Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011).

are older.⁷ This deserves some attention. Nero is “my Lord” or “our Lord.” This way of address was not invented by Neronian imperial ideology, but it gained amazingly in popularity during his rule, giving a highly political background to the New Testament style of calling Jesus “Lord” even when referring to Jesus as a human being in Galilee.

The Greek attention given to Nero finds an elegant, though to us perhaps strange, expression in Plutarch’s vision of the netherworld in his philosophical essay *De sera numinis vindicta* (Περὶ τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ βραδέως τιμωρουμένων). Nero is announced to be reborn as a deadly viper for having killed his mother, but a heavenly voice grants a reprieve and he is made into a frog so he can at least cultivate his beloved voice (*Sera* 32, 567EF; cf. the form of punishment in Plato, *Laws* 872C-873A).⁸ This, of course, is highly ironic. The divine pardon is given a reason: it is because Nero had granted freedom to the one nation most beloved by the gods, i.e. the Greeks. Decades later, Pausanias calls Nero in a similar vein “a great soul corrupted by bad education” (*Description of Greece* 7.17.3, making use of Plato’s words in *Republic* 491E); in another passage, however, Nero is a temple robber (*Description of Greece*. 9.27.4). Other Greek writers such as Lucian and Epictetus express similar ambivalence towards Nero, quite different from the wide-reaching condemnation that had become the rule among Latin historians. To what degree the historic Nero himself can be seen as a “Hellenistic ruler” is much disputed. He seems to have loved Greek theatre but did not show any interest either in the very Roman gladiatorial games or purely military matters. Moreover, his travels in Greece gained much attention and may express a sincere admiration of Greek culture.⁹

This all makes it easy for us to understand the rise of pretenders following Nero’s death, which took place 68 C.E. Several impostors emerged claiming to be the emperor, always able to hope for some support in the East. The Greek philosopher Dio Chrysostom wrote,

7 Full documentation in Marco Frenschkowski, “Kyrios,” *RAC* 22: 754-794.

8 For the frog imagery, see Petronius, *Satyricon* 77.6 and the frog fables of Phaedrus; for the reception of Plutarch’s passage in later literature cf. R. M. Frazer, “Nero the Singing animal,” *Arethusa* 4 (1971): 215-218; Frederick E. Brenk, “From Rex to Rana: Plutarch’s Treatment of Nero,” in: idem, *Relighting the Souls: Studies in Plutarch, in Greek Literature, Religion and Philosophy, and in the New Testament Background* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1998), 82-103. Plutarch’s view on Nero is rather ambivalent also in other passages, cf. *Mark Antony* 87.4; *On Talkativeness* 505C; *Precepts of Statecraft* 14, 810A; *Galba* passim. See also Christopher Prestige Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

9 For full documentation see Frenschkowski, “Nero,” passim.

there was nothing to prevent his [Nero's] continuing to be Emperor for all time, seeing that even now everybody wishes he were still alive. And the great majority do believe that he still is, although in a certain sense he has died not once but often along with those who had been firmly convinced that he was still alive. (Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 21.10, transl. Cohoon)

This was written perhaps in 88 C.E. or a bit later, alluding to the false Neros. Domitian had banned Dio from Italy in 82, and perhaps it was this reason why Dio saw Nero in a friendlier light.¹⁰ The latest author who refers to *Nero redux* or *redivivus* as a still living popular superstition is, perhaps surprisingly, Augustine 300 years later. He writes:

some suggest that Nero himself will rise again and will become Antichrist; others think that he was not slain, but was rather withdrawn so that he might be thought to have been slain, and that he is still living in concealment in the vigour of the age that he had reached at the time when he was supposed to have died, until in his own time he shall be revealed and restored to his kingdom. (*City of God* 20.19, transl. Greene)

In another type of legend, Nero comes back from death itself, that is, from hell. Already in his lifetime, according to a strange prophecy given by "mathematici" (astrologers), Nero was foretold the loss of his empire. Some astrologers also promised him instead the rule of the orient (*dominatio Orientis*), particularly the sovereignty of Jerusalem (*regnum Hierosolymorum*) and a happy turn of his destiny (Suetonius, *Nero* 40.2). Otto Neugebauer, a historian of ancient astronomy, mathematics, and astrology, has put forward the thesis that the ultimate source of this prediction is the ὄρασις of Critodemus, known from the writings of the elder Pliny. This might be an early testimony for emperor ideology appropriating some kind of Jewish Messianism.¹¹

More important for our purpose are the false Neros leading rebellions during the years following Nero's death, showing the high veneration of Nero in the East even long after his death. We can be reasonably sure about three such figures.¹² The first pseudo-Nero appeared and quickly gained support especially among the army deserters in autumn 68 or winter 69 in Achaia. He started on a career of piracy by waylaying merchants and stealing their

10 Cf. Klauck, "Do They Never Come Back?"

11 For more on the astrological background, see Frenschkowski, "Nero," 856.

12 Documentation in Frenschkowski, "Nero," 856-864.

cargo and also attempted to build up an army. He was hunted down and killed by Calpurnius Asprenas, the governor of Galatia and Pamphylia, and his head was sent on tour through Asia and finally to Rome.

The second false Nero was an Asiatic called Terentius Maximus who somehow looked like Nero and also sang to the lyre as Nero was said to have done. He gained his main support in Asia Minor and led a small army across the Euphrates, obviously having received promises from the Parthian king Artabanus III to restore him to his Empire in Rome. This was also a short-lived affair; Terentius Maximus was executed when his fraud became known. The third pseudo-Nero emerged during the reign of Domitian. He had also deluded the Parthians and almost initiated a war between Rome and Parthia. His activities include documents forged in Nero's name that promised his imminent return.

The predominantly negative image of Nero is deeply influenced by senatorial historiography, especially Tacitus and Suetonius and to a lesser degree Dio Cassius. However, those who originally followed the false Neros must have seen him as a fascinating figure, certainly someone to be missed. This all has led in recent historiography to some radical rethinking on the character and personality of Nero, bringing his image closer to how the followers of the false Neros may have seen the emperor. Some scholars have imagined Nero as a kind of a spoiled youth, comparing him to the Bavarian king Ludwig II who as a champion of the arts and of architecture completely devastated the state finances and was declared insane in 1886 just to save the state from bankruptcy. This interpretation, as all such comparisons, is way too simplistic. Richard Holland's and Massimo Fini's recent books¹³ belong to such revisionist approaches. These seem to me, however, overstatements, although it is clear that the Christian portrayal of Nero is one-sided. It should not be forgotten that Nero's image has not been completely negative in the West: the Renaissance scientist Gerolamo Cardano already dedicated an *Encomium* to Nero. However, only a few years after Nero's death, his public image at least in Christian sources was clear-cut and well-defined: Nero was a monster of iniquity, a destroyer of Christians, and the murderer of both wife and mother.

Another revisionist theory that goes against more traditional ideas pertains to the Great Fire of Rome, which destroyed three of the fourteen city quarters completely and seven others almost completely. Nero accused Christians of the fire, but they were not persecuted as Christians but as

13 Richard Holland, *Nero: The Man behind the Myth* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000); Massimo Fini, *Nero: Zweitausend Jahre Verleumdung* (München: Herbig, 1994).

arsonists – a fact that can be seen from their punishment of being burned alive.¹⁴ There was no charge of Christianity because no such charge existed, although Tertullian later claimed so with his famous *institutum Neronianum* which probably does not refer to any formal legislation, however.¹⁵ The connection between Christians and the fire is only given by Tacitus; Suetonius mentions the persecution of Christians *en passant* as one of the better and wiser decisions and laudable acts of Nero, speaking about the fire in a totally different context. Josephus mentions neither one nor the other, and Dio Cassius, as always, keeps silent about the Christians whom he seems to have deeply despised. The ancient theory that Nero himself was somehow responsible for the fire cannot be proven and is not very plausible. But what about the Christians? Might the accusations against them simply be true?¹⁶ One possibility, which I only mention briefly to show how complicated things have become, is that a Christian apocalyptic activist group could have been behind the fire. Although this idea might seem anathema in a theological context, the theory has some appeal to historians of antiquity because we know how such activist and terrorist religious groups can completely switch their frame of reference after a traumatic experience. This is what happened, e.g., to the group Ōmu Shinrikyō that was responsible for the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway 1995. After the attack, the Shinrikyō Group became pacifist, even separating themselves from their leader figure. Could such a thing have happened with Christianity in the city of Rome? I would simply like to mention the possibility.

3. Nero and *Nero Redivivus* in the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature

The New Testament contains only a few explicit references to Nero. The name occurs in the subscription to 2 *Timothy* in some ancient witnesses but in none of the most reliable manuscripts. He is regularly alluded to in the later parts of *Acts* (Acts 17–28), where he is simply called βασιλεύς or more often Καῖσαρ (as in Phil. 4:22). The Greek way of alluding to the emperor as βασιλεύς even led Western Christian authors occasionally to call the emperor *rex*, something quite impossible for pagan writers (as, e.g.,

14 Cf. Timothy D. Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History* (Tria Corda 5; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 1–41, 331–337.

15 For all details, see Frenschkowski, “Nero,” 864–868.

16 So, e.g., Gerhard Baudy, *Die Brände Roms* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1991).

Philastrius, *Diversarum Hereseon Liber* 29). In Agrippa's great speech in Josephus (*Jewish War* 2.345-404), Nero is also simply called Καῖσαρ as in *Acts*.

Among the evangelists, it is mainly Matthew who clearly shows traces of anti-imperial language and legends that may have Nero in mind. The story of the wise men from the East (Matt. 2), as I see it, cannot really be understood other than as a counter-legend against the well-known triumphal adoration of Nero by the magi and king Tiridates of Armenia in 66 C.E.¹⁷ This was a major event in its time; in fact, it is said to have been the most lavish welcome given to any foreigner in Rome in the whole first century. The voyage of the magian king, who was accompanied by a personal guard of 3,000 soldiers, was paid for by the Roman fiscus. It is said to have cost 800,000 sestericii per day, because the king strictly observed magian, i.e., Zoroastrian ritual. This was also the reason why he could not use a ship, since he might have defiled the waters, but instead travelled by land. Nero later asked him to initiate him into magian mysteries, even though he was one of the few emperors who never was initiated into the Eleusinia. Tiridates honored Nero as his personal God, declaring “ἡλθόν τε πρὸς σε τὸν ἐμὸν θεόν” (Cassius Dio 63.5.2). Subsequently, Nero crowned Tiridates King of Armenia.

The gigantic Pompeian theatre, the biggest theatre of the world, was completely covered with gold foil, and the day of the event was called the Golden Day (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 33.54; Cassius Dio 63.6.1). This was to remind Romans of the comeback of the Golden Age, which was a central idea of both the Augustan and the Neronian imperial ideologies. A gargantuan awning or solar panel spread above the theatre depicting Nero as the Sun God. This solar ideology of a new Golden Age found its most well-known expression in the statue of the emperor erected near the *vestibulum* of the *domus aurea* – with its 36 metres, it was the highest statue in the Roman Empire, even higher than the famous Helios in the harbor of Rhodus. After Neros's death, it was rededicated to the Sun God, whose image as a cosmic steersman it showed. Hadrian had the statue removed to the front of the Colosseum. Recent research¹⁸ has tried to figure out the rationale behind Nero's megalomaniac self-staging. Scholars take his self-image as an artist quite seriously and interpret his violations of the taboos

17 Discussed in Marco Frenschkowski, “Frühe Christen in der Begegnung mit dem Zoroastrismus: Eine Orientierung,” in *The Parthian Empire and Its Religions: Studies in the Dynamics of Religious Diversity / Das Partherreich und seine Religionen: Studien zu Dynamiken religiöser Pluralität* (eds. Peter Wick and Markus Zehnder; Pietas 5; Gutenberg: Computus, 2012), 163-194, see also Marco Frenschkowski, “Traum und Traumdeutung im Matthäusevangelium,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 41 (1998): 5-47.

18 E.g., Champlin, *Nero*, passim.

of Roman society as a kind of artistic ongoing Saturnalia. Even though the basic pattern of Matthew's story of the birth of Jesus is Moses typology, Matthew or at least the source he uses for the magi story seems clearly to be familiar with Tiridates's adoration of Nero and intends his account of the messianic child as a counter-story.¹⁹ Nobody could forget about this famous event when speaking of magi.

Astral symbolism is also linked with the emperor, though not only or particularly with Nero. Astral symbolism is common in imperial language; as a new star high in the heavens, Nero brings peace, stability, and grandeur to Rome, writes Lucan in the prooemium of his *Bellum civile* (1.45-59). In later passages, however, he becomes more critical of the emperor. Curtius Rufus calls the emperor a new star, *novum sidus* (10, 9, 3), and Valerius Flaccus says of the later emperor Vespasian that he will become the new polar star giving orientation to sailors on the sea (*Argonautica* 1.11-19). Manilius, writing earlier in the first century C.E. (we cannot date him exactly), takes it for granted that the emperors in fact are stars, having come down to earth for the sake of humankind (*Astronomica* 1. 799; 4.57-62). A little earlier (first century B.C.E.), the oriental king Antiochus I of Commagene has a heavenly counterpart in Regulus (α Leonis), the king's star, as depicted in his famous Lion horoscope on the Nemrud Dag. Astral symbolism plays a role in Nero's life, too. His birth was surrounded by strange light phenomena (Cassius Dio 61.2.1 cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 6. 1) and Chaldaei, astrologers from the east, predicted world rule to him, as Tacitus reports (*Annales* 14.9).

This all is what *Matthew* 2 is also about, though there are many other narrative dimensions in that story, too. For example, a direct pre-text to the passage can be found in the book of *Numbers* that depicts how "a star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (24:17). Nero and other emperors are very much present in the *Gospel of Matthew*, but they are unseen figures – always in the shadow in the gospel narrative. Nero boasts that he can take away and give kingdoms to whom he will (Cassius Dio 62.5.3), which closely resembles the boasts of another figure in Matthew's temptation story (Matt. 4:8-9). When some of his treasures seem to have gotten lost at sea, Nero publicly announces that the fish would bring his possessions back to him at his bidding (Suetonius, *Nero* 40.3). This rather

19 The commentaries are reluctant to concede this, but given the vast impact of the magian's voyage to honor Nero it seems implausible that a story such as Matt. 2:1-12 could have been told without this obvious allusion. See e.g. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew. Vol. I* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 230.

20 Helmut Waldmann, *Der kommagenische Mazdaismus* (Tübingen: Wasmuth, 1991), 42-48 and 179-80.

ridiculous story immediately brings to mind the Matthean legend of the stater in the mouth of a fish (Matt. 17:24-27), and so on. Further, there are other, more elusive references to Nero in Matthew's story. The parable of the treasure finder (Matt. 13:44) might allude to the famous treasure hunt in North Africa, which Nero ordered to recover the buried riches of Queen Dido. This led to nothing but laughter about the foolish Nero who had believed a Punic tell-tale story. The very end of the gospel – where all authority in heaven and on earth is invested in Jesus (Matt. 28:18-20) – contrasts with Nero's eternal reign (*aeternus populos rege*, Calpurnius Siculus 4.144).

In several other texts, there were more open ways of speaking of the emperor. From second to fourth-century Christian literature, Nero is generally known as the evil persecutor. John Chrysostom calls him the most evil man ever (*Homilies on Matthew* 33.10.4 [90.28.11]; but cf. Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*. 1.10). In the short histories intended for the general public by the pagan writers Aurelius Victor or Eutropius, the material about Nero is extremely repetitive and derived almost completely from Suetonius. The late fourth-century poet Prudentius makes the personified city of Rome lament Nero's vices, and the fifth-century poet Sidonius Apollinaris gives Seneca's endeavors to educate Nero as examples of how fruitless even the best education can be (*Carmen* 9.230-240; cf. 5.321-22; 7.106-109).

Nero also becomes a metaphoric point of comparison. Tertullian calls Domitian a "Subnero," half a Nero (*Pallium* 4; cf. *Apology*. 5), a comparison that Pliny the Younger and others also use (Pliny the Younger, *Panegyricus Traiani* 53; cf. Ausonius, *On the XII Caesars* 12; Martial 11.33; Orosius, *History Against the Pagans*. 7.10). Titus behaves like Nero, says Suetonius (*Titus* 7.1; cf. Dio Cassius 65.15.1; Aurelius Victor, *Epitome de Caesaribus* 10.5) and Marcus Aurelius feared that his son Commodus might become another Nero (Scriptores Historiae Augustae, *Marcus Aurelius Antoninus* 28.10; cf. Scriptores Historiae Augustae, *Commodus* 19.2) – a fear that did in fact materialize. More interestingly, Nero is also evoked in church polemics. For example, Jerome calls Rufinus ("Grunnius") *intus Nero, foris Cato*, "at home a Nero, in public a Cato" (*Letter* 125.18 [To Rusticus]). As late as in the sixth century, Gregory of Tours called the Frankish king Chilperich *Nero nostri temporis et Herodis*, "the Nero and Herod of our time" (*History of the Franks* 6.46; cf. 1.25; 4.12).²¹

Another point deserves even more attention, as it goes back to New Testament times. Nero is not often explicitly mentioned but only hinted at, and sometimes spoken of in veiled language. The *Nero redivivus* legend

21 For further details about Nero in the early church, see Frenschkowski, "Nero," 871-878.

became an integral part of Antichrist mythology and seems to have been part of early Christian arcane teaching. This is well known of the *Revelation of John* and the number of the beast 666 (Rev. 13:18). This has convincingly been interpreted as the numerical value for *Neron Kaisar* in Hebrew letters, making use of gematria. This also explains the variant reading 616, which may be caused by defective, non-plene writing of the name Neron. The defective form can be found on an Aramaic papyrus from Murabba'at (NRWN QSR).²² According to conventional exegesis, it is only possible to understand *Revelation* 13 and 17 against the background of the emerging *Nero redivivus* legend.²³ The wounding and healing of the beast (Rev. 13:3) and the eighth king who is also one of the earlier seven kings (Rev. 17:8-11) are clear allusions to the *Nero redivivus* legend.

Scholars have generally assumed that the gematric connection of the number 666 to Nero was quickly forgotten, since Irenaeus already gives other, quite impossible interpretations. However, the Donatist *Liber genealogus* in its 438 C.E. version still knows that both 666 and 616 refer to Nero (*Monumenta Germaniae Historiae, Auctores antiquissimi* 9.194-95). Victorinus of Poetovio's millenarist commentary on *Revelation*, written around 280 C.E., which makes it the earliest known commentary of the text, also knows about the Neronian connection of *Revelation*, although not about the number symbolism. It is the only commentary until the Reformation that sees this connection clearly.²⁴ According to Victorinus, *Revelation* was written under Domitian, who is interpreted as the sixth emperor of the list (Rev. 17:9-11). In this case, Domitian himself is not *Nero redivivus*. In the works of such later commentators of *Revelation* as Ticonius (late fourth century) who wrote under the persecution of Donatists, or Primasius (sixth century), this whole complex of ideas is absent, no doubt due to the spiritualizing tendency of later readers of the *Book of Revelation*.

22 Pierre Benoit, Józef T. Milik and Roland de Vaux, eds. *Les grottes de Murabba'at*. (DJD 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), nr. 18. Without the grecisizing nun at the end, the numerical value is 616.

23 See, e.g., David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (WBC 52B; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 737-740; Akira Satake, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (KEK 16; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 347-48; Otto Böcher, *Die Johannesapokalypse* (4th. ed.; EdF 41; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 84-87; Dietrich-Alex Koch, *Geschichte des Urchristentums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 481. Koch nevertheless dates *Revelation* to the time of Hadrian, following the speculations of Thomas Witulski.

24 This was already emphasized by Bousset, *Der Antichrist*, 52. The text is edited by Martine Dulaey 1997 (*Sources chrétiennes* 423). A recent English translation is found in *Latin Commentaries on Revelation: Victorinus Petavionensis, Apringius Pacensis, Caesarius van Arles, Beda Venerabilis* (ed. and trans. William C. Weinrich; Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011).

Enigmatic apocalyptic ways of speaking about Nero are even clearer in the *Sibylline Oracles* where references to Nero and his coming back from the Parthian empire to conquer Rome have been found (e.g., 4.137-141). Nero is said to have previously fled over the Euphrates, and he is called the mother-murdering “Great King” (4.119-124). The text seems to have been written immediately following the eruption of the Vesuvius in 79 C.E. Some scholars see here a direct impact of the false Nero Terentius Maximus. The fifth *Oracle*, redacted under Marcus Aurelius, contains some verses that seem to go back to the Hadrianic era. They also refer to a figure returning to the West with a Parthian army that aims to conquer Rome (*Sibylline Oracles* 5.109; cf. 93.101). This later text is characterized by a rather detailed image of the historical Nero. It even mentions his order to dig a shortcut through the Isthmus of Corinth. The Sibylline author saw this as godless work, perhaps because Jewish slaves were used for it (*Sibylline Oracles* 5.28-34, 93-110, 133-61, 214-27, 361-96; cf. Josephus, *Jewish War* 3.539-40). After Nero’s death, his successor Galba abandoned the project because it was too expensive. The oracle explains Nero’s plundering of Rome as a divine vengeance for the destruction of Jerusalem. On the other hand, it is Nero’s blasphemous ὕβρις that leads to his own destruction (*Sibylline Oracles* 5.33-34, 139). We encounter the same legend again in the eighth oracle (8.70-72, 139-59), which may be either a Jewish or a Christian work from the era of Marcus Aurelius; lines 217 to 500 are clearly Christian.

The apocalyptic Latin Christian poet Commodian (sometimes dated to the third century but perhaps better placed in the early fifth century) duplicates the Antichrist figure. *Nero redivivus* is the corruptor of Rome, whereas the real Antichrist will be a “king from the East” (*Carmen de duobus populis* 823/946 [CCL 128.103-108]). Nero appears *ex locis apocryphis*, “from secret places” (830 [l. c. 103]). In his earlier work *Instructiones*, Commodian seems to have known only one Antichrist figure identified with the *Nero redivivus* (1.41 [l.c. 33-34]), who returns from the realm of the dead, conquers first the West and then the East, and persecutes Christians as a Jewish pseudo-messiah (*Instructiones* 1.41.7 [l.c. 33]).²⁵ The two antagonists of God represent Jews and pagans: *nobis Nero factus Antichristus, ille Iudaeis*, “for us Nero became Antichrist, he [the king from the East] for the Jews” (*Carmen* 933 [l.c. 107]). Commodian is an interesting case among surviving ancient eschatological writers, multiplying the number of “Gottesfeind” figures from different sources such as *Revelation*, the *Sibylline Oracles*, 2 *Thessalonians*,

25 Another interpretation is given by Schubert, *Studien zum Nerobild*, 387-88.

etc. He even includes “Apollyon” (Rev. 9:11), interpreting him as a Gothic king (*Carmen* 805/822 [l.c. 102-03]).

4. Nero and Christian Arcane Teaching

These observations lead to some suggestions not so much about Nero himself but about the place of the Neronian Antichrist mythology in early Christian teaching. We can most conveniently see this from a later passage in Sulpicius Severus, the biographer of Martin of Tours. We quote a passage from his *Dialogues* (late fourth century). Some friends are speaking about their memories of Martin’s non-public teaching to his disciples. They recount how, while waiting outside of Martin’s cell, they heard a conversation from within and were filled with awe, sensing that something divine was going on. When Martin comes out from his chamber, they ask him what it was. He replies,

‘I will tell you, but I beg you will not speak of it to anyone else. Agnes, Thecla, and Mary were there with me.’ He proceeded to describe to us the face and general aspect of each. And he acknowledged that, not merely on that day, but frequently, he received visits from them. Nor did he deny that Peter also and Paul, the Apostles, were pretty frequently seen by him. Moreover, he was in the habit of rebuking the demons by their special names, according as they severally came to him. He found Mercury a cause of special annoyance, while he said that Jupiter was stupid and doltish. I am aware that these things seemed incredible even to many who dwelt in the same monastery; and far less can I expect that all who simply hear of them will believe them. For unless Martin had lived such an inestimable life, and displayed such excellence, he would by no means be regarded among us as having been endowed with so great glory. And yet it is not at all wonderful that human infirmity doubted concerning the works of Martin, when we see that many at the present day do not even believe the Gospels. But we have ourselves had personal knowledge and experience that angels often appeared and spoke familiarly with Martin. (...)

But when we questioned him concerning the end of the world, he said to us that Nero and Antichrist have first to come; that Nero will rule in the Western portion of the world, after having subdued ten kings; and that a persecution will be carried on by him, with the view of compelling men to worship the idols of the Gentiles. He also said that Antichrist, on

the other hand, would first seize upon the empire of the East, having his seat and the capital of his kingdom at Jerusalem; while both the city and the temple would be restored by him. He added that his persecution would have for its object to compel men to deny Christ as God, while he maintained rather that he himself was Christ, and ordered all men to be circumcised, according to the law. He further said that Nero was to be destroyed by Antichrist, and that the whole world, and all nations, were to be reduced under the power of Antichrist, until that impious one should be overthrown by the coming of Christ. He told us, too, that there was no doubt but that Antichrist, having been conceived by an evil spirit, was already born, and had, by this time reached the years of boyhood, while he would assume power as soon as he reached the proper age. Now, this is the eighth year since we heard these words from his lips: you may conjecture, then, how nearly about to happen are those things which are feared in the future. (*Dialogues* 2.13-14; transl. Roberts)

According to Sulpicius, Martin distinguishes between Nero and the Antichrist. Regardless of this, Nero still plays a role in the eschatological scenario. What is also noteworthy is how this revelation narrative is given as a “special teaching” not available to the church in general but only to a few trusted individuals. The most important point of it is the information that the Antichrist “by now” (when the author writes) may already be a grown-up man ready to go public. This all brings us to our main point. It would be a great mistake to think of “secret teaching” as a category only belonging to “gnostic” Christianity (which we will not discuss here). Even the mainstream Catholic Church in the fourth century has such teachings – insider knowledge.

For present-day Christians, particularly among Protestantism, it is sometimes difficult to realize to what degree ancient Christianity in fact looked like a mystery cult. Arcane discipline is a vital characteristic of church life. Special attention was directed towards the Eucharist, which was something not to be divulged to non-Christians. They had to leave the congregation when the non-public part of the worship started, as already instructed in the early church orders (cf. *Didache* 9, 5; Pseudo-Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 27 [FC 1, 280-282]; *Didascalia Apostolorum* 3.10.7 [tr. A. Stewart-Sykes, p. 190]; this may not have been a general rule in all congregations).²⁶ According

26 Still in the fourth century, Basil the Great (*On the Holy Spirit* 66) forbids forever the writing down of the central mysteries of Christian worship. See many parallels to this in Perler, “Arkandisziplin”; Powell, “Arkandisziplin”, both *passim*.

to Justin (1 *Apology* 65), non-baptized people were not even allowed to take part in the prayers. Such exclusion of non-believers from the central rites is very common in the ritual systems that we call mysteries. We might call them cults, but since this is today understood as a derogatory term, it is better to speak of mysteries as a religious subsystem of ancient religion. When the great satiric writer Lucian characterized Christianity in the second century, he called it *καινή τελετή*, a new mystery cult locally led by a *θιασάρχης*, a hierophantic cult leader (Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus* 11).²⁷ This was also the impression Celsus received somewhat later from his outsider's point of view (Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.59-62). There has been a long and still very vital scholarly discussion about the validity of this comparison, and the famous studies by Jonathan Z. Smith have described the rationale and hermeneutics behind it.²⁸ Our question here is much more modest, not about ritual mysteries or secret teaching as such²⁹ but about the ambivalences of secrecy in speaking about eschatological figures. There are many passages that clearly show that the Antichrist lore was insider knowledge, only hinted at in public writings, even though it sometimes belongs to the important category of "open secret." In the *Gospel of John*, Jesus says: "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him" (John 5:43). According to the interpretation of the early church, this was also an allusion to an Antichrist figure (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.25.4; Eusebius, *On Divine Manifestation* 4.35; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 12.2).³⁰ As

27 For the interpretation of this passage, see especially Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, *Der Kynismus* (forthcoming).

28 Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion 14/1988; London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1990). For a more recent multifaceted statement, see Christoph Auffarth, "Mysterien (Mysterienkulte)," *RAC* 25: 422-471.

29 For such teaching in a non-gnostic sense, cf., e.g., Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 5.4.26.1-5 and many similar passages. In his view, Paul could not write down all the things he had to say. Cf. Powell, *op. cit.*, 4-6.

30 Michael Theobald, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes Kapitel 1-12* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 2009), 416-17. He is reluctant to think of any particular and well-cut figure. Cf. Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 328-29, who, however, completely misunderstands the structure of the arcane hint and tries to give a vague general meaning to the passage. For the early interpretations that understood the Johannine passage as an allusion to the Antichrist, see Walter Bauer, *Das Johannesevangelium* (3rd ed.; HNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1933), 90-91, and Bousset, *Der Antichrist*, 108.

Wilhelm Bousset puts it, "this is how almost all church fathers interpreted this passage and we have to learn from them concerning it."³¹

The arcane character of such eschatological teaching can perhaps better explain why so many early Christian writers so quickly forgot the role of Nero in the *Revelation of John*. Even Irenaeus did not realize this connection and had to employ guesswork when explaining enigmatic passages in *Revelation*, the number of the beast being among them (*Against Heresies* 5.29.2-30.4). As this was a subject spoken about only in closed circles, it had not reached all later writers, even though in some cases it did survive through several channels.

The rather contorted way in which the writer of *2 Thessalonians* and the evangelists John and Mark (13, 14, where the change of gender is understood only by those initiated into Antichrist lore) speak about the Antichrist and the symbolic style used in *Revelation* and the *Sibylline Oracles* to allude to Nero may be further implications of the fact that this was arcane knowledge. As such, it was not strictly secret, but rather, it was a shared mystery that could only be hinted at. The impression we get from the sources is that such "mysterious matters" did not belong to the "Great Mysteries", so to say, such as the Parousia of Christ, but to the smaller events before the second coming, i.e., the Antichrist mythology. Christian teachers most definitely did not tell everything to everyone, although the distinctions got blurred from the fourth century on. This makes the passage about Martin of Tours even more interesting. Eschatological doctrine about Nero and to some degree about the imminent expectation of an Antichrist figure was secret knowledge to be shared only with the select ones.

In the Christian tradition, Nero became a figure who defined one of the faces of evil, even with his more childish, ambitious, and ridiculous character traits, though in historical reality he may have been a kind of spoiled artist, seduced by the power he gained as a very young man. But for the general image of early Christianity, it is probably even more interesting that Nero became a mythical Antichrist figure, *praecursor antichristi*, as Jerome calls him. As such, the lore about him participated in the more arcane part of Christian teaching. Antichrist lore and other special eschatological teachings were part of what was not generally spoken about in church. It seems to have been secret knowledge to be explained only to chosen disciples, as in the case of Martin of Tours. Not everything in ancient Christianity was public.

31 "So legen fast alle Kirchenväter die Stelle aus und von diesen hat man eben auf diesem Gebiet zu lernen." Bousset, *Der Antichrist*, 108.

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